

FRANÇOIS MAURIAC  
THE STUFF OF  
YOUTH  
(*La Robe Prétexte*)

Translated by  
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‘ . . . Quelques larmes seulement, et un de ces longs souvenirs qui durent toute la vie, sans la déchirer . . . ’

ALBERT DE LA FERRONNAYS

‘ . . . Un jeune garçon français que de prêtres, sa mère gardaient, a connu une trop longue suite de soirées inquiètes, pour ne pas confondre l’amour avec l’inconnu, il ne sait quelle solitude . . . ’

CHARLES DEMANGE





# I

GRANNY kissed the top of my head, as she always did when she came to say good-night, and took away the lamp. The luminous circle which it made upon the ceiling, followed her and disappeared. It seemed to me as though the walls of my bedroom drew apart. Familiar objects ceased to exist. My little bed was now adrift upon a sea of shadows. I should have liked to grip the bars with my two hands, but granny had crossed them on my breast. I had got into the habit of never going to sleep without the presence of that powerful talisman of living flesh and blood. But sleep would not come because this was the night on which an angel was to visit me, as he visited Tobias in my Bible History, and leave, to mark his passage, a most lovely pink Easter Egg upon my table. I did not want to violate the mystery. I was afraid to see. A sound, like someone tearing a piece of linen, filled the room, or, rather, like the noise made by massed and invisible wings.

It was earlier than usual when I woke. A heart-shaped hole in each of the shutters let in the light. My bedside book, *Les Malheurs de Sophie* lay open at the page which contained a description of Sophie wolfing down rye-bread and cream. I realized, as I did each morning, that the rosary was no longer round my wrist. I knew where I should find it. This unintended sacrilege, though of daily occurrence, appalled me. Because it was Easter Sunday, the world was all a sudden tumult of cathedral bells, and I remembered the nature of the visitation with which my

room had just been honoured. In the mountain of tissue-paper and blue ribbon on the table, I recognized the formless mystery of parcels. Jeanne d'Arc upon the mantelpiece had her usual, everyday appearance. The posies on the curtains still looked, according to my whim, like an old gentleman's bald head, or the number twenty-three. Above my bed, Our Lady of Victories on a solid cloud dandled the infant Jesus, and, on the opposite wall was Mignon, as always shedding tears of homesickness, in an old gilded frame on which the flies loved to congregate. My ambition was to get up unassisted, so that I might untie the multicoloured ribbons by myself, and see what the angel had left for me—an ambition beyond my power to achieve, because my nightgown was secured with a draw-string so that I was like a prisoner in a sack. Besides, no sooner had I thrown back my blankets than the cold of the room made me catch my breath, and I snuggled down again in the warm bed. I wanted nothing with sufficient eagerness to get it at the cost of even the slightest discomfort. At once I felt myself hedged round by that light morning drowsiness which was no more than a faint mist lying between me and the outer world.

A muffled sound from the other side of the wall made me prick my ears. I knew precisely what had caused it. My cousin, Camille, had just jumped out of bed, her two bare feet descending heavily upon the roses of her bedside rug. Anxiously, I looked at the door which, at any minute now, she would fling open in the hope of startling me. I knew with absolute certainty that I *should* be startled. Already my heart was beating more violently than usual, and the cry which I should inevitably utter when I saw her, was making my throat contract.

This little girl of eleven was for me the personification of every kind of hidden danger. Not content with giving me a fright which I was already feeling in advance, she would, I knew, come into my room in her nightdress, in defiance of

every canon of propriety, and so throw me into still greater confusion. Not that she was in the least little bit indecorous in her long nightgown. Dressed like that, she seemed to me like a princess in a fairy-tale, moving on tiny feet which were wholly concealed from me in the trailing garment which had the colour of moonlight. All the same, I was secretly scandalized by these morning incursions. Everything about her, if it came to that, got on my nerves. My emotions, where she was concerned, were violent and complicated. There was hatred in them, admiration and fear. On Thursdays, with a bevy of girlfriends about her, she made a point of laughing at me, calling me 'Mr Stand-in-the-Corner' because it was always my turn to be 'It'. I recovered something of my dignity only when, at the game of 'Ladies and Gentlemen', the part of gentleman was mine beyond dispute. But when Camille, with her air of aloof superiority, said—'Kiss me, then, and go back to your shop.' . . . I made haste to gain the refuge of my room, where I turned the key in the lock and surrendered utterly to the indescribable delight of reading. To start a book was, for me, like embarking on a long journey. The world dissolved, and I sat, with my hands pressed to my ears to shut out any sound that might prevent me from treading the sanded paths where Sophie de Réan, Madeleine de Fleurville and Marguerite de Rosbourg made me free of all their games. The effect upon me of the comtesse de Ségur, *née* Restopchine was to destroy completely life as I knew it, and to transport me, alive and kicking, to the shaded orchards of Normandy, peopled by demure young misses already in the throes of girlhood friendships and anodyne misunderstandings. There I forgot entirely all that could cause suffering to my boyish heart—Camille's ill-nature, Thursday frustrations and duties unperformed. I lived in one long game of hide-and-seek with little playmates less tormenting, all of them wearing, as I knew from endless poring over Bertall's

illustrations, long drawers which showed beneath their skirts.

I loved enumerating to myself the members of Mme de Réan's extensive domestic staff. If only, I thought, Granny could also boast a chef, numerous pantry-boys and footmen—in fact, a household comparable to that described so smugly in those volumes compiled for the entertainment and instruction of the moneyed young. Once, I even ventured to put this wish of mine into words, thereby rousing her outraged anger. She heaped upon me abusive, and not always comprehensible epithets, for the old lady's rages sometimes found expression in the dialect of her native Gascony: but I could guess enough to know that she thought me a 'little no-good', 'a spoiled brat'—with not enough to do.

Though myself not out of boyhood, I found delight in following Paul, Madeleine and Sophie into the years of their maturity. They became grown-up, they even married. The charming tales already set me dreaming, aroused in me a troubled sense of the unknown, gave me an obscure glimpse into a spreading universe thick-sown with feelings of which, as yet, I had had no experience. I can best describe this mood by saying that it bore some resemblance to the excitement which comes over one when one hears the distant promise of the sea before clambering up the final dune which hides it from sight. I still remember certain words which moved me strangely, such, for instance, as Sophie's answer when Paul, after much journeying and many shipwrecks, asks whether she has forgotten him. 'Forgotten, no'—she says—'but you lay sleeping in my heart, and I dared not waken you. . . .'

Somewhat later, it was Zenaïde Fleuriot who satisfied my taste for the romantic. I have a memory of ruined castles under a lowering sky, of little Breton towns, of ancient aristocratic spinsters with touching and ridiculous obsessions, of two

quarrelsome boys called Kadock and Tourbillon, of dreamy young women who would not marry because they were too rich, or not rich enough.

Even the most loved and cherished of young boys, if oversensitive, is never happy. It was you, Mme de Ségur, and you, Zenaïde Fleuriot, who set me free from ill-learned lessons, from Thursday punishments, and rough games. I took refuge in your stories. When bedtime came, Granny's kisses found an unresponsive brow. The formal phrases of the evening prayer hung about me like incomprehensible music. The procession of demure young girls and uncouth urchins with good hearts followed me to my room and filled my dreams.

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## II

THE door was suddenly flung open, and I uttered a cry. Camille stood before me, a small figure dressed in white. One rebellious lock of hair had fallen over her eyes. Her rather fleshy mouth was in constant movement, as though she were endlessly sucking sweets. My secret name for her was *M. Séguin's goat*, but nothing would have induced me to put that unflattering nickname into words.

'What'th the little thilly got thith morning?'—she asked, imitating the lisp with which I was afflicted.

'Open the parcels'—I replied, adding with a lordly gesture: 'you can keep anything you like.'

I had my dignity to consider. It was important that I should surrender with a good grace what I knew, in advance, she would take in any case, with or without my permission. Shuffling her feet, so as not to trip over her long nightgown, she at once applied her mind to the business of stock-taking.

'Bangers for you'—she said, tossing over two sweets wrapped in a cracker of gold paper.

Next, she produced a wooden-shoe make of pink sugar, and I had already got my hand ready to take it when, with disconcerting suddenness, she decided that it would look very well on her mantelpiece. Finally, she presented me with an oval frame in which I recognized a photograph of my mother, who had died when I was six.

The drooping eyelids gave to the face a look of infinite weariness, and the eyes themselves seemed to be gazing into a



world which lay beyond the confines of our mortal life. The velvet collar was supported on a *ruche* of white tulle. From the immense misty stretch of my past, I tried to evoke a memory of the dead woman's face, only to realize with despair, that I could envisage only her gestures, the look she had had of always being cold, her way of always holding her hands spread fanwise to the fire, her attitude of complete surrender during the celebration of the Mass. . . . But her features escaped me, became little more than a blur. All I retained of her were insignificant impressions, such as the scratching sound made by her low chair upon the floor, when she moved it closer to the blaze. But something of her expression, of her smile, I found again when I recalled the first day on which she had taken me to school at the convent of the Bonnes Soeurs. The capes hanging against the walls were filling the class-room with the smell of damp cloth. To myself I had said, with a feeling of terror—'now I am going to be asked questions. . . .' The Sister-in-charge, did, indeed, put one to me, but I could not utter a word. 'He has lost his tongue,' she said, and all the other children burst out laughing. I stared at the ceiling in an effort to keep back my tears, but in vain, because my cheeks were wet with them. Someone opened the door, and through it came the mingled smell of greasy soup and chlorine. All of a sudden, I saw my mother smiling at me through the window. Never, in the whole course of my life, have I experienced the wild sensation of joy and deliverance which came to me then. I jumped up; I ran to her; she took me in her arms, and I was safe at last.

'It is a picture straight from Heaven . . .' I said to Camille, who was sitting on my bedside rug with her arms clasped round her knees.

Her answer was a little mocking laugh. She took the photograph out of its frame, turned it over, and read: 'Charles Chambon, photographer: Allées de Tourny, Bordeaux.' Seeing

my crestfallen expression, she clapped her hands, and called me a little ninny.

What I felt then was not so much surprise as misery. At twelve years old, I accepted every kind of day-dreaming as truth because I wanted it to be true. But Camille deprived me of the power to deceive myself. She was a down-to-earth little creature, without complexities of any description, and thought nothing of destroying the fragile notions which gave beauty to my life. I wanted, however, to save one at least of them from disaster, and took my courage in both hands.

'Anyhow'—I said: 'The church bells go to Rome on Maundy Thursday, and come back on Easter Saturday . . .'

Camille raised her shoulders in a shrug, and stuck out her lower lip, a way she had of expressing scorn.

'I'm sure of it'—I went on: 'I saw them last year flying across the sky above the Place Pey-Berland.'

She tapped her forehead with her finger.

'I *did*!'—I repeated, in the tone of an early Christian making confession of his Faith.

Camille looked at me uneasily. She made some casual remark, and left the room, obviously deep in thought. As she glided over the floor, she looked, for all the world, as though she were walking on the waters.

### III

THERE was nothing left on the table now but crumpled tissue-paper and blue ribbon. Another small happiness was finished and done with. I searched my mind to see whether the coming week would contain anything comparable. On Thursday there would be the Saint Cecilia concert to which my aunt always took us so that we might get used, as children, to listening to 'great music'. But my grief was on too small a scale to match with the Fifth Symphony. So far as I could make out the sole purpose of the orchestra upon the platform was to keep me from going to sleep. My feet were tortured by chilblains, and felt as though they were on fire in the patent-leather boots which had been bought for my First Communion. The young girls round me all had orchestral scores open upon their knees, and these they followed with their fingers so that no one should be left in doubt of the progress they had made in reading music. The elderly ladies beat time with their feathered hats. But up in the top gallery the intense face of a young man expressed so terrible a joy that I suddenly got a glimpse into that unknown kingdom where Beethoven and Wagner would one day offer me an escape from life.

On that Saturday afternoon, I wandered from room to room. I had a slight cold, just bad enough to excuse me from going for a walk in the Public Gardens. How was it possible not to detest those dry and arid paths with their hordes of scolding nursemaids, those moments of loitering round the baskets in which were displayed dusty cakes and sticks of barley-sugar which we were forbidden to buy, and then, the walk home with its in-

evitable headache and, already, that nostalgia bred of the memories of feast-day evenings, of which only later we are aware, when the triviality of pleasure is revealed to us in our years of adolescence: . . . The only part of the Public Gardens which I liked was the corner reserved to a botanical display with its flora of little labels inscribed with mysterious names conjuring up a vision of tropical islands and bloodstained blossoms the scent of which can numb and kill. . . .

My favourite occupation was to hang over the railings of the balcony at home. Immediately opposite was the Square Saint-André with its garment of new leaves, and the pink and white candles of the chestnuts doing honour to the Month of Mary which so soon would be upon us. Swifts were streaking the warm sunlight, and the trees were filled with the din of invisible sparrows. Pigeons in wheezy flight decided to make a crowded landing in the middle of the square, where they tempted a watching child with the promise of easy capture, and took to the air again only at the very last moment. A bell was sounding the end of Vespers, and a black crowd came through the church doors and dispersed. The smell of hot stone made me think of the summer, of the end-of-term examinations, of the solemnities of Prize-Day, of trunks brought down onto the landing, of sleepless nights in a cloud of mosquitoes. This evening a smell of burned grass would drift into the city—the basic smell of summer holidays.

Granny and Sister Marie-Henriette signed to me not to lean over the railing. Though no vehicle was in sight, they hesitated for a good five minutes before venturing across the square. When, at last, they made up their minds to take the plunge, an omnibus suddenly turned the corner, and pursued them until they reached the opposite pavement.

## IV

WHEN the days grew longer, Granny disliked having the lamps lit. I stayed out on the balcony. In the half-light the cathedral looked as though it were touching the sky. I remembered that Granny found an especial pleasure in having God so close to her, and that, in fine weather, she said her prayers in front of the open window. In those days my mind was filled with thoughts of love and devotion. My First Communion was still the dominating influence in my life. During the months of preparation I had acquired a taste for perfection. The senior priest, the abbé Maysonnave, had given me a small, richly-bound volume to serve as an account-book of my moral state. Each day I had to enter in it the number of times I had won a victory over my besetting sin, as well as all my prayers, and all the merits which I had amassed. During the retreat, I passed three days torturing myself with thoughts of death and eternity, brooding on the general confession and the ill-defined sins of which I supposed myself to be guilty.

But when the glorious day dawned, I knew unblemished happiness. Our trousers, our waistcoats, our armlets were all of white, and even the roughest-tongued of the ushers spoke to us in hushed, respectful tones. What a clear picture I still have of the school chapel so overloaded with flowers that the smell of it was sickly-sweet. I can hear again my own pure, childish treble singing—*Tabernacle redoutable*, and the sobs, imperfectly stifled in parental handkerchiefs, when the abbé Maysonnave addressed a few tearful words to us. He spoke of those among us whose mothers or whose fathers had passed away. For them it

was possible to hold converse with their dead only in the great silence when they returned to their places from the Holy Table. . . . At that moment I was struck to the heart with an infinite self-pity.

When Mass was over the playgrounds were aglow with sunlight, birds and fluttering banners. The opened parasols looked like great flowers. We exchanged holy pictures with our friends. Mine had been illuminated on parchment by Mlle Dumoliers, one of my grandmother's poor cousins. Even my uncle was present on that occasion. I had noticed him in the chapel seated with his wife and his daughter, Camille. His face with the marks upon it of late nights spent playing baccarat at the club, his monocle, the flower in his button hole, everything about him struck me as strange in those surroundings, and I could not but feel that he was paying a great compliment to God and to myself. Camille, dressed as she had been at her own First Communion, was 'renewing her vows'. She looked very pretty, I thought, though Granny insisted that she reminded her of a fly drowned in milk. I was amazed to find her so gentle, and to see that her eyes were red from crying. Mlle Dumoliers stroked my cheek and addressed me as her 'dear little angel', with such a show of emotion that I was conscious of my extraordinary purity, and felt the need to look at myself for a moment in the glass. . . .

Back at the house, I held close to my face the copies of the *Imitation*, and the prayer-books, in mauve and gilded bindings smelling deliciously of Russia-leather, which several ladies had given me as mementoes of a memorable day. They were printed in different-coloured letters, and I read upon the title-pages dedications signed by bishops with outmoded names.

In the course of the following June, I, with three other first-communicants, were accorded the signal honour of being

chosen to carry the canopy at the Corpus Christi procession on a day of brilliant sunshine. We had spent the previous day, from dawn till dusk, adorning the wayside altars. I was constantly being sent to the Sacristy for candelabra and flowers of golden paper. In that high-ceiled room, heavy with the scent of wax and incense, Father de Roquetaillarde, our Superior, assembled us at dusk. Beribboned baskets were placed upon our laps, and these we filled with roses. Through the open window we could see an angry sky across which copper-coloured clouds were moving. The sound of distant thunder made us uneasy. But Father de Roquetaillarde, after an upward glance, said: 'I think the storm is moving away.' Nevertheless, the piled roses which the gardeners heaped at our feet, were wet with the first drops of rain. The intenser fragrance which they spread, and the heaviness of the air, made me feel terribly listless. Night fell, and in the dark chapel where we could just make out the forms of kneeling figures, our hands, moistened by the roses, and scratched by the thorns, were joined in prayer. Then Father de Roquetaillarde recited the prescribed prayers for fine weather.

And what a dazzling occasion it was! I moved forward, a small, hieratic figure, shuffling through the spread carpet of leaves and roses, gathered on the previous evening under a warm rain. A light breeze sent the dying flowers fluttering down upon us from the acacias. I could see, from far off, the packed onlookers fall to their knees as we approached, and bow their faces to the ground. Without a pause the sweet sporano voices sang the *Lauda Sion Salvatorem*. At a sign from the master of the ceremonies, we halted. A dense host of choir-boys turned towards us and, to an accompaniment of jingling chains, the censers swung and drenched us in a smoke of glory. Petals, scattered by small gloved hands, rained down upon us. The heavy banners caught in the branches. The great crowd

had but one heart of ardent love and purity. The Real Presence had ceased, for it, to be a mystery.

How deep a silence filled the dusk when, after the wayside altars had been dismantled, the birds once more took possession of the garden! All that evening, I, the little boy who had taken part in the triumph of God, was conscious of an inner glow. It seemed to me, as I leaned upon the balcony, that the stars were forming yet another procession in that Kingdom into which our own had been unable to penetrate, treading the highway of the Milky Way which looked to me like a magic thoroughfare of flowers.



## V

I BECAME aware that I had, for the first time, triumphed over a woman, when I heard Camille ask Sister Marie-Henriette: 'Jacques couldn't *really* have seen the church bells flying back from Rome, could he?'

'There is nothing impossible in that,' said Sister.

Her face, framed in an immaculate coif, was without expression. For years past, the whole of her attention had been given to Granny's rheumatism. Though she lived under the same roof with us, we knew neither her real name, her age, nor where she came from. A thin gold ring had sunk deep into the pale and puffy flesh of one of her fingers. When in the presence of my aunt and my grandmother, she knitted incessantly; I found it hard to believe that there were enough poor in the town to use all the cardigans which she produced. . . . At five o'clock, regularly, she laid her needles and her wool aside, and said her rosary. I used to sit on a stool at Granny's feet, trying to follow with my eyes the scarcely perceptible movement of the boxwood beads, and my ears cocked to catch the muffled clicking of the innumerable medals spaced along the length of the crowded string, while I watched the pale lips of Sister Marie-Henriette perpetually moving, moving, moving. I liked, too, turning over the pages of the fat Book of Hours, bound in black cloth, and with an elastic band to keep it shut. It contained a quantity of First-Communion pictures, and others, too, which perpetuated the memory of dead friends or pupils. I remember one in particular which showed the features of a pale little boy. Sister had nursed him, so she said, in a

country where it never rains, and the air is for ever filled with the scent of spring. But even all that sunlight had been unable to save him. I can still see in memory the dark shadows under his eyes, the pathetic smile, and, underneath, the sacred words: 'I am the resurrection and the life . . .'—'Except ye be as one of these little ones.'

When the time for her Office came, she would take the book from me. But I always stayed to watch her turn the pages, holding them close to her short-sighted eyes, and greedily speaking the Latin words as though they had a delicious flavour which she could taste upon her tongue. She never indulged in profane reading, except on Saturday nights, when the caricatures in *Le Pèlerin* drew from her little bursts of laughter which she quickly stifled. She loved that humble, unpretentious sheet which breathed in every line the love of God and of His poor. Together, we used to look at the pictures of men whose monstrous bellies were encircled by masonic aprons, though the fact that the colours overflowed the lines of the drawings worried me. There was another in which the Bad Workman was shown seated at the door of a tavern. Issuing from his mouth was a balloon on which were the words—'Down with the Church!', and, in the background, a long-haired priest with downcast eyes, accepted the insult with Christian humility. On the facing page was the Good Workman, busy mending a clock, with his sleeping child in a cradle beside him, and his smooth-haired wife laying the table for supper. A crucifix, with a palm-cross, hung upon the wall. The bed was out of sight. These artless, but far from stupid, pictures drew from Sister Marie-Henriette comments which were frequently wise and to the point.

When she answered Camille's question, saying that I might well have seen the church-bells flying in the sky on Maundy Thursday, she accompanied the words with a faint smile. My

cousin realized that she had been made a fool of. But I dared not enjoy my triumph. Camille remarked, tartly, that she had only pretended to believe me, and gave it as her opinion that there couldn't be a worse blockhead in the world than me.

When she spoke in that particular way, the little girl seemed to increase in stature. There was a stately quality about her fits of anger which were worthy of a King's Daughter. Despite the trembling of her lips, and the clenching of her teeth, she maintained an apparent calmness which, at such times, imposed respect even on the grown-ups. She often managed to nonplus them, for her questions were so direct and specious that her elders could get out of answering them only by sending her to bed without any pudding. But, fully conscious of her victory, she would loudly hum a military march, and, with an air of command, give orders that the room should be made ready for her earlier than usual. . . .

On that particular evening she gave expression to her scepticism in no uncertain manner, and even dared to speak, with a little laugh, of babies being sent from Paris to their mothers in packing-cases from the *Bon-Marché*.

This was going too far, and encroaching on forbidden ground. My aunt rose to her feet, and a resounding box on the ear left Camille bewildered, furious and unable to conceal her tears. She left the room, slamming the door behind her, while Sister Marie-Henriette proceeded to rub Granny's temples with toilet-vinegar.

## VI

As I sat upon my little stool, my feelings were divided between pleasure at having seen Camille well and truly smacked, and fear that she would make me pay dearly for the pleasing spectacle. Granny told me to turn up the wick of the lamp. This I did, but, instead of returning to my seat, started to wander, as was my habit, round the room, rummaging in its familiar nooks and crannies. On top of a chest-of-drawers there was a picture of Pius IX in a gilt frame fitted with a pair of miniature shutters. I thought it great fun to shut these, so that I could see the smile of the imprisoned Pontiff through the narrow slats. There was an ebony casket, too, set with moonstones, and from it came the resinous smell of scents which Granny had formerly kept in it. She often spoke to me about the old days, for she knew the pleasure I took in hearing over and over again the stories with which I was long familiar. 'On my wedding-day, in February, 1848, the Mayor said to me: "Madame, I am not sure whether I ought to marry you in the name of the Republic or of the King" . . . ' . . . 'Did you ever see the King, Granny?' . . . 'I once saw his sons, who were remarkably fine-looking young men. Your grandfather rode on horseback, with all the other young men of good family, in front of the Princes, as far as the Porte des Salinières. . . .'

To myself I repeated, in a low voice, 'the King's sons'—summoning before my eyes a fairy-tale which had 'really happened'.

In a black frame there was the portrait of a man wearing a

high white cravat and a saffron-coloured waistcoat with the top buttons undone. He was Granny's father. In the background was a romantic-looking lake and a range of blue mountains. I found something both thrilling and disturbing in the story of his life. 'The Emperor'—said Granny—'had killed off all the full-grown men, so he rounded up the youngsters, like my father, who, by the way, looked no more than fifteen even when he had passed his eighteenth birthday, and couldn't carry his musket. You have inherited his elongated brown eyes and his narrow face. He escaped from barracks, and was hidden under the staircase in that little corner where you are sent to stand when you have one of your rages' (it was an understood thing in the family that I had one 'rage' each year, and that this inevitably took place either on Easter Day or on the 14th July). 'When the Emperor was defeated'—Granny went on—'there were illuminations on the water-front all the way from Brienne to Bacalan. . . .'

I looked in the glass at the thin face and elongated brown eyes which that delicate and charming young man had passed on to me. I felt less ashamed of the terrors which afflicted me when the furniture creaked in the night, and when, in the dusk of the evening, the corridor seemed an infinity of shadows hinting at concealed dangers and mysterious ambushes. . . .

I loved listening to Granny, and treasured the things she told me in my heart, so that they should not be lost. But it was an even greater pleasure for me to hear her when she was talking with another person of mature years, because then she did not have to worry about whether I should understand, did not have to talk down to me. Nor was what she said on those occasions expurgated in deference to my tender age. At times, needless to say, I found some of her allusions obscure, but the subjects of which she treated were not numerous, and, by dint of listening to her repetitions, I gradually succeeded in fathom-

ing each mystery. I knew her conversations off by heart, as I did the tunes in my musical-box, and needed to hear only the first few words to guess the end of the story. The inattention of my aunt, who had been familiar with her talk for far longer than I had, was a source of discouragement to Granny. Sister Marie-Henriette, whose job it was to be kind and thoughtful, did her best to seem to be listening, but, when confronted with a sudden question, was apt to give a quite irrelevant answer.

‘Do you know, Sister, how old I was when I got married?’

‘I entirely agree with you, madame’—Sister Marie-Henriette would answer at random, for her thoughts were God knows where—perhaps in her native countryside, though where that was we did not know—or in the quiet convent-garden, in which all the paths edged with clipped box converged on a statue of the Virgin set on an artificial rock.

Mlle Dumoliers, because she was a poor relation, and the abbé Maysonnave, because he had to find money for his needy charities, were readier to play the part of audience.

‘I have brought my work with me, Adila. . .’ Mlle Dumoliers would say to Granny.

This meant that she would stay all afternoon. Then I had to play my games in silence, in case, at the more interesting passages, Granny should lower her voice. Mlle Dumoliers had a trick of pushing her knitting-needles into her ‘bun’—which had a peculiar smell. Though she always maintained that she was losing her sight as a result of so much knitting, her eyes were still sharp, and always remained so. Her enormous spectacles served no purpose, because she wore them pushed up on her forehead, and, when they slipped down on her nose, she never looked at me through them, but squinted abominably.

## VII

ON the evening when Camille had drawn attention to herself by an act of unprecedented impertinence, I was wandering about the room from memory to memory. One of the twisted columns of the great press made a squeaking noise when one turned it which set my teeth on edge, but, at the same time, gave me pleasure. Granny, however, was too highly-strung to share my feelings.

'What an intolerable little monkey it is!' she said.

At that moment my uncle came into the room to say good-night to us. The black dress-coat fitted closely to his body, which was so thin that it looked as though it had been pulled out lengthways. Though he was almost bald, I always thought of him as a young man. Violets or a single carnation, according to the season, gave a quiet splendour to his buttonhole. My aunt neither rose from her chair nor paused in her work. She just slightly raised her face, and he kissed her on the forehead. So little attention did he pay to me, that I felt, in his presence, that I must be invisible, or indistinguishable from the furniture. Every evening he stood for a few moments in front of the two black-garbed women, an object of silent reprobation. If his daughter, Camille, happened to be present, he drew her to him and stroked her hair with a self-conscious display of affection. Then, Julien came in to tell his master that the carriage was at the door, and we were left listening to the diminishing sound of wheels upon the cobbles. I imagined the club, whither my uncle went every night, as a lighted palace filled with music, dancing and an atmosphere of quiet happiness

which vanished away at dawn. This evening departure, this escape into a world of unknown delights, always seemed to me something out of the ordinary. When my uncle had gone, a long time passed without a word being spoken. I remember one evening in particular when I stood with my forehead pressed to the window-pane, rubbing away the vapour with the muslin curtains, and watching the carriage lamps vanish into the mist. Then, suddenly turning to my grandmother, I said:

‘Granny, how old has one got to be before one can start being wicked?’

We heard the front-door shut sharply behind my uncle. My aunt, who had laid her work aside, took it up again. It seemed to me that, as long as I could remember, she had always worn the same black woollen dress. She wiped the lenses of her pince-nez, and her weak eyes looked as though the light was hurting them. Nothing ever seemed to rouse her from a state of apathy except matters concerning social precedence, when, for instance, some lady had failed to bow to her in the street. Then, in order to console her, Granny, whose boast it was that she knew Bordeaux like the back of her hand, would point out that the family-tree of the lady in question contained the owner of a small chemist’s-shop in the Cours du Chapeau-Rouge, a domestic servant, a travelling salesman, or some other individual of base extraction. In that way I was initiated into the social inequalities of a great mercantile city. I was taught by my aunt that this tiny provincial world contained differences of rank for which there was no rational explanation; that it was very ‘low’, for instance, to be engaged in any commerce other than that of wine, and that, even there subtle differences existed. Those who dealt only in the famous vintages were superior to those who also handled ‘vin ordinaire’—while those who sold



only 'vin ordinaire' stood no higher in the social scale than a doctor or a junior university lecturer. Nothing interested my aunt so much as these trivial puzzles of etiquette, except, perhaps the quarrels of the servants'-hall.

On the evening in question, however, she remained completely silent until the moment came for family prayers.

I sat at the feet of Sister Marie-Henriette who, in a low voice, tried to comfort me for Camille's insolence. Seeing that I was looking at my mother's portrait, she told me that the good God had inspired Granny to give me that photograph, and that, in a way, it might be said to have really come down from heaven. Granny, now restored to good humour, spoke to me of the dead woman, and, while she was doing so, Camille slipped through the door and snuggled into one of the big armchairs.

'... During the last months of her life'—said Granny—'she used to get up in the middle of the night, in spite of anything we could say, and watch you as you slept. So peaceful was your sleep, that she would lean down to make sure that you were really breathing. When we tried to persuade her to go back to bed, she refused, saying—"so few days of life are left me, that you must allow me to take advantage of the nights in which to look at him . . ." . . .'

To-day, I seem to see her watching thus over my slumbers, and I cannot help thinking that what she was saying then ran something as follows:

'My dear little son, had I lived I would have taken you to your catechism lessons, I would have shed quiet tears at the Mass of your First Communion. You would have come home in the evenings with your cape heavy with rain and your satchel made shapeless by the weight of dictionaries and unnecessary pencil-boxes. You would have held your small, brown ink-stained paws to the fire . . . and when small human

paws no longer hold us back, it is easy enough to wish for death. I would have mingled my life with yours. I would have watched a solemn look grow in your eyes, and so pure would your first love have been that you would have asked nothing better than to tell me of it. . . . I take with me into eternity the child, the boy whom I shall never know. . . .’

I hid my face in Sister Marie-Henriette’s skirt, and hers she kept bent over her abandoned knitting. That night we made our responses with more than customary fervour, and the rendering of the magnificent *De Profundis* sounded like the tremendous granting of a prayer.

Just as I was falling asleep in the bed of my childhood, I felt upon my tear-stained cheek the brush of a kiss. I opened my eyes and, in the flicker of the nightlight, saw a small glimmering figure slip from the room. It was Camille.

## VIII

NEXT morning, I took the photograph from its frame, and stowed it away in my pocket-book. It served me as my sole support through the long and sunless months which preceded the sudden spring of my fifteenth year. It helped me to survive those terrible moments of waking, when the morning was still half night, and I could hear Octavie coughing outside the door where she stood waiting for the clock to strike before coming in. After the warm abyss of sleep, how freezing was the room in which a fire was never lit (it was essential, said Granny, to build up character in the young. *She* had been brought up without a fire, and see how, whenever she had a cold in the head, it never went to her chest!). When I had drunk my chocolate, I had to stand shivering on the pavement, mournfully awaiting the arrival of what we called the '*parcours*'—the big school omnibus which, on its progress through the grimy dawn, picked up successive loads of sleepy schoolboys. An unobtrusive bell sounded from the cathedral tower, and the regular attendants at the six o'clock Mass—those pious fauna of provincial churches—began to emerge, one by one, from the dark streets. Then I remembered that I had forgotten to say my prayers, and hastily recited them with my eyes raised to the pale glimmer of the early sky. The clatter and the jolting of the bus became gradually audible above all other sounds, and, since the coachman never pulled his horses to a complete standstill, the daily terror of missing my foothold when I jumped for the running-board, made my heart beat faster.

which was regularly ordered for me every winter—of that unforgettable cheviot which was fated to grow shiny over my shoulder-blades, at the elbows, and on the seat of my pants, and to collect stains which nothing would remove? Suddenly voluble and confused she began to talk to me of my father. I had long believed that he was in the grave, but it now turned out that he had died no longer ago than the previous May, in Tahiti, where he had been living after leaving us in circumstances about which I was to learn later. Granny looked at me with such pity in her eyes, that I felt a show of tears was expected of me. But I was conscious of nothing except annoyance at not being afforded more than a glimpse of the drama, at not being able to construct a version of my past on a basis of accurate fact. I could feel no grief, and, since Granny was obviously expecting a violent manifestation of some sort, decided, for want of anything better, to lose my temper. Why, I asked, had I been made to say so many pointless *De profundis* for someone who was still alive? Coming from so well-balanced a boy, this outburst had much the same effect as thunder sounding from a clear spring sky. By what right had I been deprived of my father? The old lady showed no sign of anger, but gently stroked my hair. I was too young to understand, she said. He had left us while I was still a little child. He had himself expressed the wish that I should never know about him. But, because he had loved my mother, he had loved me, too. I persisted with my somewhat mechanical display of ill-temper: 'I have been praying all this time for someone who was still alive, Granny. . . .' She assured me that God would give him the benefit of my prayers, since he had never ceased to believe in our holy religion. With such words did my grandmother try to do justice to a man whom she had little reason to love. To the eyes of a well-trained little Catholic like myself, this display of self-discipline on the part of the old

lady was clearly visible, and turned me from my purpose. My mood grew softer. She produced a thin trickle of tears, those tears of the very old who have not many to spare, while I, for my part, with a prodigality suited to my age, indulged in a storm of weeping. She told me that when I was sixteen, I should read a letter which the poor dead man had left for me—but that I must ask her no more questions now, for she could not answer them. 'Go upstairs, my dear, and try on your mourning.'

While M. Etienne was making marks with a piece of white chalk on the black material, I looked at my face in the glass. It had not changed.

## IX

ON New Year's Day, being in mourning, I visited nobody but Mlle Dumoliers. On that day her poverty took on the aspect of a privilege. The girl who showed us in was a gaping kitchen slut, but my aunt was never tired of expressing surprise that Mlle Dumoliers, her position being what it was, should allow herself the luxury of having a maid at all. Small though the drawing-room was, it found no favour in the eyes of my aunt, who discovered an especial cause of scandal in a picture which Mlle Dumoliers had hung in it. More than one Paris dealer had offered her two thousand francs\* for that picture, and nobody—so my aunt maintained—who lived by sponging on others (not to put too fine a point on it) had any right to keep a canvas worth that amount of money, simply on the grounds that when she was a little girl she had formed an affection for it because it used to hang in her father's study. Besides, it was so obscene in its implications that only 'the gentlemen' could see the point of it and keep from laughing when they looked at it. Personally, I found nothing reprehensible in the stationary cab with a sly old coachman smoking his pipe on the box, and a drawn curtain which revealed a small hand dangling from the window.

This year, I paid my visit to Mlle Dumoliers unaccompanied. Granny was suffering from her asthma, and my aunt was only just getting over the unpleasant fact that, on Christmas Eve, her husband had, quite flagrantly, caught the eleven a.m. express to Paris, taking with him in his wallet, the greater part of the

\* In those days worth about £80. (Translator).

income which was likely to materialize before the following summer. He had gone so far as to mention, with brazen insolence, a Christmas Eve party at the Café de Paris, where, before swallowing a morsel of food, he would have to pay twenty-five francs for the mere privilege of sitting down and bombarding the ladies at the nearby tables with little celluloid balls. Camille was spending her holidays in the Basque country, with the uncle of one of her girl-friends, Conception Ximénès.

Oh! those Bordeaux streets on New Year's Day, with humanity at its most abject, exhibiting in slow procession, a retrospective display of ancient top-hats, and young 'blades', full of their own importance, leaving calling-cards by the hundred at the various houses in which, during the year just past, they had danced under the heady stimulus of orangeade! The morning papers had contained an announcement to the effect that neither the Cardinal, the Mayor nor the Prefect would be at home to visitors. Nevertheless, the city officials set out, from force of habit, on a tour of visits, in the company of wives whose gloves smelt of benzine. The last evening of the year is an occasion of gloom, in the course of which, where families are assembled, each survivor keeps a watchful eye on the other survivors, trying to decide who will be the next to go. Only the children, filled with hopes and longings, become fretful and over-excited at the spectacle of gleaming toys which usually bring disappointment when distributed and examined.

I, too, took with me a top-hat—but concealed in an enormous cardboard-box. On the previous day, Mlle Dumoliers had suggested my borrowing it from my uncle's wardrobe. Having been followed in the street by men, and exposed to remarks which she chose to regard as improper, though only to be expected, she was anxious to hang an object of male headgear in her hall. The mere sight of it, she assured me, would discourage the designs of any too insistent a gallant. Fifty years

of chaste existence had failed to rid her of certain obsessions scarcely compatible with her status. 'Your status'—my aunt had blandly remarked, 'gives you a place of honour in the Church.' Mlle Dumoliers was too timid to reply that widows, no less than virgins, were well considered in the assembly of the faithful, and that the indifference shown by my uncle where his wife was concerned, fully entitled her to claim the privilege of widowhood. . . .

I had reached one of the more outlying quarters of Bordeaux where the single-storied houses were inhabited by university professors, schoolmasters and old ladies in their second childhood. Here and there, a detached Louis XVI *pavillon* which had been designed by Louis or Gabriel, served as a reminder that some Bordeaux merchant, enriched by traffic with the Indies, had once owned a country-house there. Had I been able to enter one of them, I might have found, under a rough surface of distemper, precious remnants of carved mahogany, a concealed overmantel, a scrap of patterned parquet.

The little maid, as slatternly as ever, took the cardboard box with a conspiratorial smile. At the far end of the passage, a garden door, with panes of red and blue glass, opened into a yard. The smell of the cat-box pervaded the whole place. Mlle Dumoliers in person opened the drawing-room door, and bestowed a tearful glance upon the ancient beaver. She made me sit beside M. Castagnède, our lawyer, who offered me his bald pate to which, despairing of distinguishing head from forehead, I applied my lips at random, with the dutiful air of a boy who is too young to be disgusted by anything.

M. Castagnède's self-assigned mission in life was not limited to building up a prosperous practice—the largest, as a matter of fact, in the whole of Bordeaux. He had a passion for 'les Landes', for the tree-topped dunes and the lonely meres which lie in an undisturbed slumber along the stretch of coastline



eroded by the Atlantic Ocean, a region little known and difficult of access, the glories of which he had celebrated in Parnassian verses, which had been crowned by the Academy of Bordeaux, and published in the Album issued by the Compagnie du Midi. He had bought a country house at Saint-Eulalie-en-Born, a village standing where the pine-woods are diversified by peaceful stretches of salty pasture-land, and cradled by the sound of swaying tree-tops and the roaring of the nearby ocean. He was now describing its beauties to Mlle Dumoliers, who would have liked to receive a more specific invitation to admire them for herself during the holiday. . . . As I took my place on a chair, the red-rep covering of which was protected by a crocheted antimacassar, M. Castagnède was engaged in expressing surprise at the affection felt by us for our estate at Ousilanne, which lay at the very gates of Bordeaux. He was quite sure that by the time I came of age, my uncle's bad handling of my interests would have made it necessary to sell the place—'and then'—said he, 'you can come and live at Saint-Eulalie. . . . What a spot for the meditative mind! . . .' As I listened to him, my thoughts were fondly dwelling on the low-built house in the Gironde, where I had spent my childhood, the path which circled the estate, the sun-drenched vines, the unruffled fish-pond, and the chapel, covered with ivy and wild roses, in which my grandmother had obtained permission from the late Cardinal Donnet to give shelter to the good God from the 1st August to the 2nd October. Meanwhile, M. Castagnède was drawing a comparison between himself and Pierre Loti. 'I,' he said, 'am spoiling the Côte d'Argent as Loti has spoiled the Basque country. I am attracting people to it, and it is no longer a rare thing to find upon the forest roads of Mimizan and Biscarosse motor-cars stranded in the sand. . . .'

He took his leave. Mlle Dumoliers looked at me over the top of her spectacles, saw my black suit, and murmured:—‘you have my sympathy, dear boy. . . .’ The sly old coachman on the wall set my imagination roaming along forbidden paths. There were peacock feathers in the Louis-Philippe vases on the mantelpiece. The smiling faces of former pupils looked into the room from plush frames. Mlle Dumoliers’ lips were trembling. I knew that she was about to reveal to me the secrets of my strange and melancholy past. I helped her a little by heaving a sigh, and assuring her that grandmamma had told me everything. . . . ‘Is it possible’ she murmured, ‘that you really know?’

‘I know,’ I said, greatly daring, ‘that because of my father, my mother died of grief.’ ‘No, no,’—replied Mlle Dumoliers, ‘that is not true.’ The floodgates were opened, and secrets poured from between her half-closed lips.

My mother, who, according to the manners of that age, was married at midnight, had kneeled before the altar with so drawn a face and so persistent a cough, that, from then on, it had been generally supposed that she was already under sentence of death. My father, for his part, looked like a tall, dark-skinned adolescent, “in a state of ecstasy at his wife’s feet”—said Mlle Dumoliers—‘not very strong-minded, admittedly, and incapable of doing anything but paint’:—and, as she said this, the ageing spinster looked at the ceiling with pitying eyes. ‘What painting it was, too! I know what I am talking about! I have given lessons in water-colour. I signed my name to the pictures done for your First Communion, and my friends never venture to visit the Exhibition organized by the Friends of the Arts, without me, because they know that I will point out to them what is worthy of admiration. But your father’s pictures were nothing but a sorry jumble, and so daubed with bright colours that it made one’s eyes ache to look at them. He

never cared whether people approved of his work or not. I remember one evening when your mother had joined in our laughter at a canvas of his in which there was nothing to be seen but blue. He took her face between his two hands, and said: "You don't begin to understand!"—with so strange a look in his eyes, that we stopped laughing. His religion was even more extravagant than his painting. *I adore light*, he said, and quoted a text from the Scriptures where it is said that God "hath set a tabernacle for the sun." It was about that time that he became obsessed by the thought of distant travel. He wanted to set out—how well I remember the comic phrase he used, which made us roar with laughter—for *the unknown blue of the Tahitian nights*. Tears would have been more to the point than laughter. At last, from sheer weariness and love, his wife gave way. He jealously hoarded every tiny object associated with his childhood, and used to pore every evening over his old school atlas. I remember how the chalk which he had used to colour the maps, came off on his fingers. But he had to wait until you were born, and when you were, your mother took so long to recover from her weakness, and you, yourself, were so puny an object, that the doctor strongly opposed any idea of his going away. Your father's suffering as a result of that verdict was out of all proportion to the relatively small matter of postponing his journey. . . . Mlle Dumoliers paused for breath. In the ensuing silence I remembered how, one evening, when we failed to get into the Circus because there were no seats left, and I could hear through the wooden barrier, the applause and the bursts of laughter, I had been surprised to find that I wanted to die. The heart finds it difficult to endure the withdrawal of an expected pleasure. . . . 'He did not complain'—went on Mlle Dumoliers—"but stood with his face pressed to the window, saying nothing. Even his brushes lay idle. He kept on saying: "I came into this world for the sole purpose of painting

pride. Not once, but many times, she said in my hearing: "both my daughters will be married at eighteen; one marries one's daughters how and when one will." True enough, she *did* marry them at eighteen,—but how, ah! that is a very different matter! . . . I broke in on her with a request that she would cut out the reproduction of my father's picture, and give it to me. With a faint sigh, she let me mutilate that handsome Christmas number, which had been the gift of one of her old pupils. The precious picture I hid away in my pocket-book, next to the photograph which had come down to me from heaven one Easter morning.

I walked home from that remote suburb through the foggy streets. My mind was filled with a picture of those limpid Tahitian nights in the depths of which my father had lost himself. In Camille's absence the house was curiously silent. In a firm hand Granny wrote 'Adila' on the greeting-cards to be sent to our Ducasse cousins in Paris, whom we never saw. They had become something of a legend in the family. Sister Marie-Henriette, thinking, perhaps, that one should not knit on the Festival of the Circumcision, sat with her idle hands hidden in the sleeves of her habit, and silently recited her own inaudible greetings. My aunt, in a dejected mood, and suffering a good deal from her eyes, seemed to be listening to the distant ring of gold coins on a green cloth, and to the vulgar sound of popping champagne corks—perhaps, too, seeing in imagination two little hands ruffling the hair of my red-faced and guffawing uncle.

For a child, even unhappiness, just because it is *something different*, can be turned into joy. From Mlle Dumoliers' revelations I hoped that unspecified and ill-defined pleasures would emerge. But nothing of the sort happened. Like the fish-pond at Ousilanne, into which I loved to throw stones, my little life

with its still unbroken surface, became, once more, a still mirror in which motionless faces and the events of the foreseeable future lay reflected. I soon lost hope that anything would come of adventures which had reached their term so long ago. Very soon the happiness of knowing that those around me were quite sure that I knew nothing, melted away. It was futile for Mlle Dumoliers to go on for so long looking like a beaten dog, and trembling with fear lest I might betray her. I no longer even thought about what she had told me. From sheer habit, when I said my evening prayers, I still laid upon my bedside table, next to my mother's photograph, the picture cut from *l'Illustration*, though to me the strange figures in it seemed quite hideous. I would far rather have been the son of that Alphonse de Neuville who had illustrated the *History of France* with which Guizot used to read his grandchildren to sleep. The gloomy, unexciting weeks passed slowly by with nothing to mark them but a schoolboy's petty troubles. Those two years of my past seem now to have been for me a fog-bound lake from which no life emerged. Within me and without there was nothing to give me a hint of the mad and sudden spring which lay ahead, nor of the exhausting pleasures it would bring me.

## X

SINCE my birthday fell on the 1st of November, the Vespers for the souls of the faithful departed were always sung. It used to worry me that the anniversary of my coming into the world should be greeted by the mournful tolling of bells above the city where every shop was shut so as to give even the most junior assistant time in which to ponder his latter end. At night, the cake with as many candles on it as I had years, was lit in vain, because the breath with which I blew out the stubby little flames was melancholy and discouraged. We used to spend the afternoon in making an exhausting pilgrimage to La Chartreuse, which is the name of the Bordeaux cemetery, and in the evening I could still feel about me the stale smell of chrysanthemums which had been left to rot upon the graves, and looked like lovely tousled heads which had been rolled in the mud.

The one of those many All Saints' Days which I remember most vividly was that which marked the end of my fifteenth year. During the interminable drone of Vespers a misty, but still warm sun, had made us sweat in our winter uniforms. In the school parlour, thronged with domestic servants on their best behaviour, I was horrified to see Sister Marie-Henriette sitting on the edge of a chair with her hands tucked into her sleeves, as though she had resigned herself to waiting for me until the end of the world. The mere fact that she was anywhere else than in my grandmother's room, in which duty kept her all day long, seemed to be for her pleasure enough.

I had hoped that Julien, my uncle's man-servant, would have

come to fetch me, because his smoothly-shaven cheeks would have been evidence of our social importance. It did sometimes happen that Granny's rheumatism was so acute that the good Sister could not leave her for a moment. But she would never deprive herself of her one chance of going out unless there was some very good reason for her to stay indoors. It never occurred to her that there was something ridiculous in a young man of fifteen being chaperoned by a nun, or that her perpetual presence in the parlour gave some justification for the nickname 'sissy' which my schoolfellows had inflicted on me.

We started off. I was already taller than her by a head. My long, narrow reflection in the shop-windows seemed strange to me. Since I had only two more years at school, Granny had thought it an unnecessary expense to provide me with a new uniform. But I was growing all the time, and my red wrists and chapped hands projected from my sleeves in the most absurd manner. It was not my fault that the action of crossing my arms or sitting down involved the taking of infinite precautions.

That late autumn day was so like spring that I walked languidly and was prepared to take any opportunity which might present itself to laugh aloud or to burst into tears. Before kneeling at my mother's grave, we had to call a halt at the Sacré-Coeur—the convent not very far from my school which was peopled, as everybody knew, by the daughters of the leading families of Bordeaux who, on taking the veil, had paid a substantial dowry to the community. They were employed, just now, in inculcating some semblance of discipline into Camille. When, each Sunday, I went into the parlour of this establishment, I felt no emotion of any kind. But on this All Saints' Day, as I crossed the threshold, I was suddenly ashamed. As a man, at the moment of death, is said to see all the circumstances of his past life unfold before his eyes, so now, in a

momentary flash, I became aware of my every blemish and absurdity, from my great clumsy hands sticking out from sleeves which had grown too short, to the pimple on my nose, of which, for some reason or other, I could never rid myself. I dared not look to see whether my buttons were all properly done up. It seemed to me that little gusts of laughter were coming from every corner of the room. At last Camille appeared, wearing the school clothes which did not have the effect of making her look any the less pretty. Her hair, drawn back and fastened in a horse's tail, was continually getting out of control, and one errant lock which she kept on jerking backwards with a charming gesture, seemed to gambol on her narrow forehead. Her companions crowded round us, girls with shapeless figures, legs which would more properly have belonged to fat women, and narrow chests under sloping shoulders. Almost all were in the spotty stage. It was as though youth was fermenting in them like wine. Camille impulsively embraced her great friend, Conception Ximénès, and then we set off for the cemetery.

The street was crowded with slowly-walking folk, all intent on doing honour to their dead, and so used to working that they seemed embarrassed by this unaccustomed gift of leisure. They made this free holiday, this annual pilgrimage, last as long as possible, and I was surprised to see among them so many happy faces. At the entrance-gate there were banks of snowy chrysanthemums for sale. In this gay crowd one could have counted on the fingers of one hand the few faces veiled in crape. Those who had genuine tears to shed chose another day for doing so. These good, decent people were just paying a pleasant social call on the dead who had left them a long time ago. We walked down an avenue of cypresses which reminded me of what my friend, José Ximénès, had told me about the gardens of Italy, saying what fools we French were to keep for



the buried relics of humanity a tree made for sunlight and blue skies. I found much to interest me in the literary style of the epitaphs, several of which were very curious. One old man, attended by a dutiful family, was busy pulling up the weeds round the tomb in which he would ultimately repose, and reminded me of those working-folk who make an expedition every Sunday to clean and keep in trim the houses and small gardens in which they hope to spend the years of their retirement. I had not yet read enough to feel moved by that sublime tradition which ordains that one whole day in the year shall be kept for communing with the dead. I had often let my imagination dwell upon other people's deaths, and, for the sheer pleasure of crying, had pictured the various incidents of Granny's funeral. On nights when I could not sleep, I found pleasure in planning, down to the last detail, the cortège of José Ximénès, my dearest friend. I could envisage the hearse, invisible under a mass of all the known species of white flowers, and calculated how many handcarts would have had to be loaded with tuberoses and lilies. The scent of mortality filled my room, and my pillow was damp with tears. But what I felt at these mournful ceremonies was the completely detached sorrow of an immortal. Even on the day of which I am speaking, as I watched the visitors moving among the tombstones, I reflected that, in a hundred years' time, a similar crowd would be bringing chrysanthemums to the living of to-day who, by that time, would have long ago been laid to rest. But I:—I was a schoolboy of fifteen. I had not yet begun to live.

Meanwhile, Sister Marie-Henriette was silently telling her beads (an operation which the passers-by took for a nervous tick of her thin-lipped mouth), keeping the rosary concealed in her wide sleeves. Camille was running ahead, staring up into people's faces, then stopping to wait for us to catch up with her, standing in the middle of the avenue and stretching like a

young puppy tired with playing. 'Here we are,' said Sister, and I recognized the family vault. My expensive wreaths were hanging on the railings, together with a cross which I had suspended there on the morning following my First Communion, a still May day when the cemetery had looked like a big empty garden loud with the twittering of sparrows. The names of my grand-parents were carved upon the stone. My mother's came last, with the dates of her birth and her death, so close together that even the passing strangers showed signs of feeling. There was just enough room left, I thought, for Granny's, my aunt's and my uncle's. I rejoiced at so happy a coincidence, as though the mournful list, once they had been added, must then be closed for ever. It was fortunate that my father had chosen for his final resting-place a graveyard in a distant land. 'One day'—I told myself—'I will take ship and cross the seas, and visit my father's grave buried in flowers which are strange to me.' Death became, in my fancy, an opportunity for travel, an excuse for starting on delicious voyages in ships so luxuriously fitted out that they might have been designed to accommodate Lamartine journeying to the East. The *De profundis* recited by Sister Marie-Henriette with professional precision, did not disturb me. I was waiting for a revelation. I felt an absolute certainty that this evening of my fifteenth year had infinite surprises in store for me. . . . The dusk descending with a sudden gloom on this deserted cemetery had no effect upon my heart which was swelling with a strange and anguished sense of joy. First one star came out, then a second, then a third. I wanted to count fifteen of them, and see all the years that I had lived reflected in the blue darkness. Among the crowds which had overflowed onto the now barely visible roadway, tired cyclists were sounding their hooters, hoping to make people think that they were motorists. I was still waiting for my revelation. The prospect of a birthday

evening—slippers in front of the fire, a cosy family dinner, a candle-decorated cake—all this sweet perspective which, only yesterday, I had found enchanting, meant less than nothing to me now. The only thing that excited me was the thought that when Granny had tucked me up in bed, I should light the candle again, and read *Atala and René*—the little book which José Ximénès had lent me, though not without many scruples, for he feared the fate of those by whom offences come, of whom the Master said it were better for them that a millstone were hanged about their necks.

A question from Camille sent me tumbling back from heaven to earth. She asked whether her father had given any sign of life. Sister replied that a letter had come, announcing his impending return. The practical little bourgeois in me inquired about the demands for money which my uncle was in the habit of making, to which she replied that it was no business of mine—in which she was much in error, since Camille's father was my guardian, and our estate at Ousilanne would be undivided until my coming of age. I knew perfectly well that reasons of health were keeping him, not at Aix, but at the Villa des Fleurs, where he was risking the bulk of his fortune. Granny had frequently said in our hearing, that a day would come when Camille would not have a rag to her back. I looked, with a lump in my throat, at the little girl who, turned suddenly meek and obedient, was walking at Sister Marie-Henriette's side. Then I forgot all about these squalid money cares. What did money matter? This evening, no doubt, was to bring me a revelation more precious than riches, and my heart thrilled at the thought of the unknown life ahead of me: two more years of school, and then the baccalauréat. But a million obstacles lay between the then and the now, the closest of which was a mathematical problem on the morrow, in which I should most certainly come out bottom.

## XI

THE expected surprise was not the kisses given me by the abbé Maysonnave and Mlle Dumoliers—both equally prickly. Granny expressed annoyance that Sister Marie-Henriette had not thought to see whether or no the guardian of the cemetery was neglecting our tomb. The drawing-room, freed in my honour of its eternal dust-covers, was revealed in all its horrible youth. After so many years no one could now hope that the yellow of the upholstery would ever grow less vivid. All the bronzes glared at me. My grandfather had, long ago, lent money to an art-dealer who had paid off the debt with a *Dying Napoleon* ('It would not have been my choice'—said Granny—'it is too sad'), a *David* with one foot resting on a rock which I later realized was Goliath's hairy head, and a *St John the Baptist preaching in the Wilderness*. Granny fully admitted the fact that the head was out of proportion to the body. This defect she pointed out to the ladies who visited her, and was careful to tell them all about the art-dealer, so that they should not criticize her for wasting money on such expensive baubles.

Mlle Dumoliers was knitting. A poor relation must never be idle. My aunt observed that on All Saints' Day the needles should be given a rest. Mlle Dumoliers, who was in the habit of doing embroidery for the big shops, declared that it was permissible to work, provided one did it for one's pleasure, and not to earn a living. Knitting, she maintained, did not bring in as much as twenty-five sous, even if one sat up all night doing it, it was not bad for the eyes, and did not cause headaches. It

might therefore be regarded as a pleasure. Granny who always, from choice, observed the letter of the law, got out of deciding this knotty point, because she knew that the proceeds of the knitting would go to poor people who were scarcely poorer than Mlle Dumoliers herself. The abbé Maysonnave, though admitting the distinction drawn by Mlle Dumoliers, would not admit that it was absolute. He expressed this view with the casuistic skill of a man used to straightening out the differences of opinion which frequently arose in his little group of Children of Mary. My aunt insisted that when the maid, Octavie, came in to announce dinner, she would say to herself—‘If she as is so pious can work on a Sunday, then why shouldn’t I?’ Mlle Dumoliers dared not reply that Octavie, who did all the ironing and mending, kept the house clean and waited at table, would not dream of invoking her right to work on a Sunday. The abbé Maysonnave lacked the courage to quote the passage in the Gospels where Jesus asks the Pharisees whether it is permitted to perform a miracle on the Sabbath. Intent on displaying his gifts as a peacemaker, he changed the subject, saying that he had heard a good story about the late Cardinal Donnet. I was quite sure that I knew the anecdote in question, as well as all the others which would follow it. The ladies were going to have a lovely fifteen minutes of being pleasantly shocked. The evening was just like other evenings: the same pallid faces and the same unimportant platitudes. Nothing at all seemed to be changed, not even the boy so quietly intent over his photographs. His face betrayed nothing of the madness, the feverish expectation, which was making him slightly breathless. When his grandmother asked—‘Are you feeling sad, my boy?’—he did not hear her. He was a thousand miles away, out of this world, isolated in a mood of anxiety which he could not have explained.

Meanwhile, the abbé Maysonnave had abandoned the sub-

ject of Monsignor Donnet, and skilfully turned the current of talk on to a matter which was close to his heart—his Young People's Club and the twelve-hundred francs deficit which would compel him to send out an appeal for generous donations. The ladies had that absent-minded air which he knew only too well. They were busy comparing notes on the comparative merits of *broderie anglaise*, *macramé* and *petit-point*. Reduced to silence, he wiped from his face the fawning smile of the man who is no longer of this world, who is no longer anything but the servant of the poor, who will shamelessly beg from any and everybody in order to relieve and feed them. I saw at that moment, and recognized for what it was, the unblemished nobility of that face, the curious charm which the virtue of purity can confer upon a man when it perpetuates in his eyes a look of astonished adolescence. He had just that sort of distinction which, in the case of an ecclesiastic, can be described only by the word 'Roman'. His colleagues made heavy jokes at his expense because he was careful about the cut of his cassock, because he kept his hands well tended and wore gloves. I know now that mere smartness meant nothing to him. But the cassock suited his slim figure and stressed his grand episcopal appearance. Certainly, he took care of his hands that they might be worthy to touch the body of his Saviour. It was not lightly that, during the Mass, he spoke the words:—*Lavabo, inter innocentes manus meas*. . . . The clergy of the diocese regarded him as a worldly priest, but he haunted the great world only because of the financial assistance he hoped to get from it, and when he penetrated to the offices of the proud city merchants it was with a heart encompassed by the innumerable and invisible army of his poor. For their sakes he put up with the patronizing attitude of the rich, and their complacent conviction that God would one day repay them ten-fold for the glass of benedictine with which they entertained His servant. . . .

There was silence in the room, and we could hear seven o'clock chime from the Pey-Berland tower. Mlle Dumoliers sniffed, guessing from the savoury odours which had suddenly invaded the room, that dinner would soon be ready. Horses' hooves set the cobbles ringing. I played a little game with myself: that, I thought, is adventure on its way. But I did not really believe it. I was prepared to give hospitality to that particular impression when I lay in bed unable to sleep, and listened to the distant sound of a late cab, hearing the growing sound of its wheels, and then, after it had reached its maximum of intensity, forcing myself to follow it back into the distance, to isolate that especial noise from all the other noises of the town. As it happened, however, this cab *did* stop at our door. The ladies showed surprise, and hazarded all sorts of guesses. Oh! was it, could it be, the adventure I had hoped for? Then, the sound of a woefully familiar voice drifted in upon us from the hall, and, without a word of warning, my uncle came through the door. He apologized for having forgotten that there would be a reduced postal service on All Saints' Day, with the result that he had outstripped the letter in which he had announced the time of his arrival. Granny and my aunt submitted to his kisses, wondering in their hearts of what catastrophe he was the messenger. Mlle Dumoliers looked as though she was prepared to gobble up this fascinating creature whom she scarcely ever saw—this hero of a thousand fields. She admired him as she might have admired the Prince of Darkness. He was the living embodiment of Sin, which had never lost for her the charm of mystery. The abbé Maysonnave was trying to keep any hint of coldness from his attitude towards the libertine,—and I, abandoning all hope that this could be the longed for wonder, cudgelled my brains in an attempt to think what lure had brought the prodigal uncle back to the fold. Had he been plucked to a greater extent than usual at the

Villa des Fleurs? Had hunger driven him home? It would not be long, I knew, before this overgrown child revealed the motives of his return, because he could talk of himself with that complete absence of self-consciousness which was his only remaining virtue.

He told Julien to bring in the battered dark leather travelling bag, plastered with the labels of many luxury hotels, which was the proper luggage for a gentleman. From it he first brought a jewel-case which he gave to his wife. She sat there paralysed with amazement. He opened it, and put upon her finger a ring set with two brilliants. She looked at it with the bewildered air of a woman who has never received from her husband anything but daily requests for money. The diamonds glittered against her housewife's hard and horny hand like drops of water on the dry bark of a tree. Mlle Dumoliers judged them to be of considerable value, and she knew something about precious stones from having hawked so many family trinkets round the town in the course of her penurious existence. Granny was presented with a coral necklace, and Sister Marie-Henriette with a medallion. The two women looked at these gifts with visible mistrust, and the abbé was asked to bless the suspect articles. 'Bless them at once!' murmured my grandmother in the same tone of voice in which she might have said:—'they must be exorcized immediately!'

There remained a tie-pin for me and a bracelet for Camille. Only Mlle Dumoliers was left empty-handed. But my uncle asked her how she was getting on, with so passionate an interest, that the old maid was convinced that he was going to pay off her debts. When Octavie came in to say that dinner was served, my uncle took the abbé Maysonnave by the arm, and asked about his Young People's Club, hinting obscurely that he could not possibly let so admirable a charity remain bogged down in financial difficulties.



Fortune had at last smiled upon the Prodigal. He was giving himself the pleasure of returning to the bosom of his family with full pockets, and the air of a conqueror; of dazzling these contemptuous old ladies who, dumb with amazement, listened to him open-mouthed. He talked enthusiastically of Aix, of the Battle of Flowers and the dresses of the women. The gay dog described in lyrical tones the joys of casino life, of that facile and insipid existence which he adored. I, too, was all ears. For a boy on the threshold of his fifteenth year, and in a fever of excitement, these squalid details assumed a stature which was not theirs by right. My uncle's lightest word found a ready welcome in me, and I saw a vision opening of an accessible world where pleasure, joy and desire held sway.

I was submerged beneath an anticipatory flood of day-dreams. The cheap-jack quality of those paeans of the returned wanderer, entirely passed me by. All that remained with me of these pictures of his earthly paradise were summer evenings on a terrace, soft music and rockets adding their bright clusters to the shooting-stars of the 15th August. 'There was one young woman,' said my uncle, 'who was spending several months at Aix. She dazzled me every evening with a new dress, which she never wore twice. . . .' Behind my half-closed eyes, I conjured up a vision of the young woman in question, coming down a wide marble staircase between banks of flowers, in a dress which seemed the more wonderful to me for being but a short-lived splendour. My uncle, now embarked upon a description of the Lac du Bourget, suddenly turned to me:

'It's the place, you know, which was written about by that Lamartine chap you're so fond of.'

Never more, no, never, would I misjudge the man whose eyes had caught the reflections of that lake, of those silent cliffs and measureless caves, who, one evening, had drifted on those waters famed in verse. . . . My uncle, now busy carving the

turkey with its chestnut stuffing, stopped talking. In the sudden silence, Sister Marie-Henriette let fall a comment:

'In such surroundings I could not answer for my salvation.'

My uncle burst out laughing. The abbé, whose thoughts were busy with his charities, smiled, too, so anxious was he, in his kindly way, not to seem too fanatical a moralist.

This incident broke sharply in upon my dreaming. I looked at Sister Marie-Henriette. Her coif concealed the small amount of forehead with which nature had endowed her. The turkey's rich gravy gleamed upon her lips, a glittering tribute to the only self-indulgence she was permitted to enjoy. Her lids, kept lowered modestly, from habit, afforded me a partial glimpse of her round and inexpressive eye which was like that of a cautious hen. I saw Granny, propped up on her cushions, and looking enormous, with a glass of vintage Bordeaux between her trembling hands. I forgot her charity, her faith, her griefs innumerable, all the life which she had lived deprived of love, which had marked the old and ravaged face with a million bitter lines. I saw in her, at that moment, nothing but a greedy and rather cantankerous old idol who lived with colourless creatures, like Mlle Dumoliers, gathered about her altar.

My uncle, having laughed his fill, said, in reply to Sister Marie-Henriette that, as a good Christian, he believed in the reversibility of merit, and thought it wholly admirable that she should redeem, at the cost of a life spent in appalling boredom, the delightful diversions which he had chosen for himself. He had the peculiar turn of wit which one finds in second-rate worldly people. The abbé Maysonnave felt himself justified in continuing to smile, with the result that our chatter-box relative threw all discretion to the winds, and gave free rein to a number of observations which were somewhat too free for so pious an audience. Brought up on a course of very low-grade reading, he asserted that life must be lived to the full,

and that no source of pleasure should ever be neglected. I rather think that he actually referred to the sacred rights of passion. It was the sort of declamation which, for the past half-century, the more frivolous of our dramatists had been putting into the mouths of the guides, philosophers and friends who figure so largely in the lists of their *dramatis personae*.

The abbé's smile had, by this time, almost completely vanished. Only a faint hint of it remained at the corners of his lips. Such talk seemed to him hackneyed, and therefore harmless. It could be tolerated the more since my uncle, in his dealings with him at those rare moments when his luck was in, always displayed a princely generosity. But how came it that he failed to notice the boy at the other end of the table who was listening to this new gospel with such absorbed attention that he was leaving the food untasted on his plate? Through the medium of that shabby monologue, he was getting a glimpse of an art, a literature and a philosophy of life which glorifies the flesh and the seeking out of strange pleasures, things so attractive that he had always been forbidden to let his thoughts dwell upon them. My uncle was still talking, and the old ladies who sat there listening, could not, for all their equipment of sound common sense, find any argument to advance against the nit-wit's flow of pretentious doctrine. No doubt their vocabulary was too limited. Their little shocked exclamations served merely to stimulate the speaker, leading him to embark on still wilder extravagances. Octavie brought in a confection of marzipan adorned with fifteen multi-coloured candles. Granny filled a glass with sparkling wine which, according to her, was every bit as good as the best champagne. 'The greatest expert'—she said—'would not be able to tell the difference.' Unfortunately, champagne was one of the high-spots in my uncle's life of pleasure. He raised his glass to me and expressed the hope that it would be my good fortune, later on, to make

acquaintance with *real* Mumm and *real* Cliquot. What he went on to say amounted to this: that I must grow up to be a gay-dog and see life through rose-tinted spectacles. A painful silence followed this sally. I made so warm a show of thanking my uncle for his advice, that the abbé Maysonnave, who now was certainly no longer smiling, looked at me with an expression of anxious severity. I averted my eyes, and, deep within myself, blamed the priest for his silence.

We went into the drawing-room, all of us, that is, except my uncle who, according to custom, invited the abbé to smoke a cigar with him. The abbé refused the offer in so cold a voice that his host did not insist. The ladies plunged into their usual chit-chat. Mlle Dumoliers described how, coming out of church, she had slipped and hurt her knee. Though the accident was a week old, she was still suffering a good deal of pain. The doctor had prescribed compresses of peroxide of hydrogen, but they had brought her no relief. Sister Marie-Henriette smiled. We all knew that she had no belief in doctors. For all her piety she made jokes at their expense, so gross as to be worthy of Molière. She declared that peroxide of hydrogen was a ridiculous invention. She, herself, never used anything but a mixture of *water and wine*, and always with success. Mlle Dumoliers had heard about *shock-treatment*, but had had no experience of the curative effects of *water and wine*. Sister Marie-Henriette, after first consulting grandmamma, said that she would gladly give her old friend a mysterious recipe which she had. I was turning over the leaves of my photograph-album. Camille, close beside me, sat with her face between her hands, and her long brown hair falling over the book she was reading—Zinaïde Fleuriot's *Armelle Trahec*. I could hear the good Sister dictating to Mlle Dumoliers, in a toneless voice, the names of the flowers which she would need for the production of the marvellous remedy, and, while she enumerated worm-

wood and sweet clover, hyssop and ground-ivy, I was reminded of the country walks we used to take in the evenings, when she taught us how to recognize and name each growing thing. I always carried with me, on those expeditions, that ancient *Flore Médicale* in which Mme Panckoucke had painted the flowers of the creation with minute skill and a glowing palette. I loved hunting through it for mysterious names, such as the *dittany* so highly spoken of by the poets. The author of the *Flore* reminded her readers that the son of Venus and Anchises, when struck by a deadly arrow, had been cured by an application of dittany gathered on the mountains of Crete. She frequently invoked the authority of Linnaeus. The book had the musty smell to be found in old cupboards. On our way home, a lark would be singing as near as he could get to the sun, and in the harvested fields we would often put up a hare tempted out by his love of the dusk.

My uncle came back into the drawing-room. Leaning on the mantelpiece with his backside to the fire, he seemed to be no longer interested in anything but the clock. Then suddenly Julien appeared and handed to him on a salver the largest letter we had ever seen, covered with outsize, pointed and obviously feminine writing. My aunt, in spite of her bad sight, doubtless recognized the dangerous nature of the envelope, though she could not read, as I could, the printed heading of the Hotel Terminus. But even if she had seen nothing, how could she have helped catching the fragrance of musk which filled the room as soon as my father, with feverish haste, and without a word of apology, opened the flap? The smell struggled for an instant against that of naphthaline and spices which hung about the room all winter long, and served to remind us of the summer. To its winter envelopment in dust-sheets hung with moth-balls, the Louis-Philippe drawing-room owed its air of youth preserved in an eternal atmosphere of

unattractive whiffs. Whenever I kissed my aunt, or laid my head in Granny's lap, I came upon the selfsame smell, enriched by a faint reminder of benzine and turpentine. But on this particular evening no smell could long stand out against the musk with which the letter was impregnated. My uncle held it between the tips of his fingers which were trembling slightly. He told Julien to call a cab. At that moment we suddenly vanished from his universe. With a few quick handshakes he made a vague apology for leaving us. To what pleasures, what depths of pleasure unknown to me was he departing? The run-away left behind him silence and a feeling of embarrassment. The three ladies looked at the fire and attempted to find subjects of conversation which soon died away. . . . The abbé, who had not sat down, stood with his hands in his sash, and his forehead pressed to the window which framed a picture of the sky and the heavenly bodies. Camille, with expressive nudges, tried to infect me with her own sudden fit of uncontrollable laughter. I felt more like crying because I could not follow on the heels of a man who had become, in my eyes, a figure of august importance. The three silent old ladies had the appearance of lying crushed and prostrate under the vengeance of a god whom they had failed to appreciate at his true value. Camille's antics had, by now, drawn the attention of the grown-ups. My aunt, who had reason to fear one of those deliberate 'bricks' in the dropping of which Camille excelled, mentioned bed-time. I protested with a degree of violence which took the elders by surprise, for I was normally a shy and gentle boy. But how could I resign myself to seeing this evening which, in my imagination, had seemed to be so rich in endless revelations, end like any other evening? All of a sudden, the abbé came to my rescue. He asked grandmamma to let me walk home with him, in honour of my birthday. He no longer lived under the shadow of the cathedral, an enemy curé having

ousted him from that retreat. His position as chaplain to those pure and saintly souls, the Ladies of the Visitation, left him plenty of leisure in which to attend to his Young People's Club. He loved the new life thus opened to him, and was in the habit of saying: 'I receive from my penitents infinitely more than I give to them. . . .'

'But, my dear abbé'—exclaimed Granny—'I cannot possibly allow the boy to wander about the streets at this time of night!' The abbé promised that his factotum, a man called Dindinnaud, should see me home. Granny would never have consented to such a breach of routine had not my aunt, greatly to my advantage, declared sharply that it was useless to insist, and that it was time I was in bed. Grandmamma very much objected to her daughter usurping her own privileges, and taking a hand in my upbringing. I could see from the look of fury on her face that the battle was won. 'Once does not mean always'—said the old lady. But while she went in person to fetch my winter cape and a warm scarf, my aunt whispered to Mlle Dumoliers—'Do not you think that the poor old dear is failing?' Her cousin made a vague reply, of the kind frequently resorted to by persons whose position makes it necessary for them to keep in with everybody. Grandmamma, having muffled me up, insisted that when I got back. Dindinnaud should wait on the pavement until the door had been locked behind me. My aunt said in a low voice that the streets of Bordeaux were haunted at night by 'bad women'. Sister Marie-Henriette withdrew into silence and immobility. With her eyes shut, her lips pursed, and her ears covered by the coif which fitted tightly round her head, she was impervious to what was going on. Nothing could distract her attention from her own personal variant of the beatific vision, in which, no doubt, she found a source of ravishment, for she did not so much as move her lips when I said good-night to her.

## XII

A LIGHT mist was hanging round the cathedral, moistening the pavements as though rain had fallen, though above our heads the sky was full of stars. To me the street seemed empty, that same street along which, next morning, I should hasten to my daily complement of petty schoolboy miseries. The fog, I thought, must be denser on the river. We could hear the incessant call of those sirens which, long ago, used to fill my sleepless nights with a sense of desolation.

The abbé Mayonnave spoke to me of indifferent matters, but I could feel that he wanted to find out what had been going on, that evening, in my hidden self. A boy who has been brought up by priests soon becomes familiar with the manoeuvres of their kind. I did not fear them. I was a docile prey, only too ready to let myself slip into the grasp of any fisher of men. I still did not know whether the feelings which had overwhelmed me were those of pain or joy. Only he, I told myself, could help me to focus them clearly.

'I am fifteen years old, monsieur l'abbé, and this is the first time I have seen the streets of this city at this late an hour. Am I, actually, so very different from a young girl?'

'Never regret, my boy, that your childhood has been thus prolonged. Though you do not know it now, a day will come when you will realize the nature of the treasure which you have amassed in the course of those bright, unsullied days. When you know the heavy weight of weariness, you will turn your head and see it shining in the darkness. Many are the times when it has come to my help when my heart has been sad. . . .'



I listened to these murmured words, though I did not fully understand them. No one had ever yet spoken to me in so confiding a manner. The abbé fell silent, embarrassed, perhaps, at having given himself away to a boy. But in the bitter solitude of his life, what better refuge could a priest find? His fellow men give a wide berth to the black cassock. But it attracts the young person, whether he wear the smock of the undenominational school, or the sailor's jersey of the little middle-class boy. His thoughts, his inclinations interest no one except the man in perpetual mourning, who asks of him no more than to stay pure, and to give to Christ a little faith, a little love.

I put up no resistance, but surrendered utterly, and told him all my thoughts. Feverishly, I assured him that my family was carrying the work of preservation to extremes, that I was beginning to feel stifled in the company of old ladies, and, remembering something Camille had once said, which I had found so true, declared that our house smelt of mould and stuffiness. A stern look had come into the abbé's face. We were walking, I remember, along the rue Vital-Carles, past the railings of the archbishop's palace. Inside there the Cardinal-Archbishop was sleeping in his pomp and power, surrounded by his trembling vicars-general, or, perhaps, signing 'Victor Lucien' at the foot of one of those pastoral letters which were so long that it took us no less than two school Sundays to read them to the end.

'You do not know the souls of those old ladies,' said the abbé. 'To-night, my boy, I could hear within your heart the echo of a mighty struggle. . . .' He dared not speak to me about my uncle, but he did speak to me of true greatness which does not consist in seeking personal happiness at the cost of the happiness of others, of sacrificing one's immortal soul to base appetites, of turning one's back on thought and love and prayer to revel in self-indulgence. He said:—'We seek an infinite satisfaction with all our hearts and with all our minds. Let us make

sure that the senses do not usurp the rights of the spirit and the heart, do not, they too, demand unlicensed satisfaction. . . .'

I did not altogether understand what he was saying, but I drank his words greedily. They went to my head as my uncle's had done a short while previously. I did not try to bring into harmony those two mysterious symphonies. We were, by this time, passing along the Cours de l'Intendance, which was brightly lit. In the middle of a group a girl was laughing, her head thrown back and her throat showing milky-white against the rough surface of her fur coat. No other woman had so obsessed my imagination. Only yesterday, when the preacher had told the story of the young man who had died suddenly on his way from an orgy, I had supposed that an orgy consisted in eating oysters and crayfish, in drinking as much champagne as one could hold, and pouring the rest into a grand-piano. The part played by women in such gaieties, I had found vague and ill-defined. I imagined them standing about in low-necked dresses and brandishing champagne-glasses, as I had seen them depicted on a calendar of 1880, which used to hang in the kitchen of our country-house.

Soon we were back in the dark streets and lanes where, through the black branches of the planes, the basilica of Saint-Seurin showed like a dark and sleeping beast. How soft, at that hour, must be the shadows in the Choir where the lamps were guttering! . . . Into Saint-Seurin, where the chapel of the Virgin is somewhat isolated and dark, I often went on my way home from school. I went there because the weather was too hot or else too cold, because my satchel was too heavy, because I was in no hurry to say my lessons to Sister Marie-Henriette—or because my friend, José Ximénès had said something which had cut me to the quick, and because in the shelter of that church, while waiting for the lonely refuge of my bed, I could let my tears flow freely.

In front of the porch the abbé asked me what I thought was my vocation, and I answered:

'I should like to be happy, monsieur l'abbé: why are there so many different kinds of happiness?'

I still remember his reply:

'You know, do you not, that the Saviour was taken up into a high mountain by the Prince of Darkness, who offered Him the kingdoms of the world. Our fifteenth year is, for each of us, the moment when we are confronted by this temptation. The everlasting enemy sets us upon the high pinnacle of our pride, and reveals to our eyes his forbidden kingdoms, bright with the prestige which men have given them.'

I protested. I assured him that I felt something very attractive in his life of sacrifice . . . but that there were other forms of happiness.

We had now reached the deserted street where the abbé Maysonnave lived. He opened his door, and summoned Dindinnaud: then, fearing my grandmother's reproaches, told me to go home. I found myself alone with the abbé's factotum. Dindinnaud had a narrow face and a bumpy head. He walked in front of me without seeing anything, a prey to his favourite obsession, which was to assassinate an officer about whom there was a great deal of talk that year. My uncle had betted ten thousand francs to a sou with Sister Marie-Henriette, that this officer's innocence would be established. The day on which, for the second time, sentence was pronounced against him, our country neighbours, some Jews called Bazias, had taken down their Chinese lanterns, and hidden their fireworks under the ironic gaze of my grandmother who, leaning across the hedge, had called out under their very noses: — 'At last justice has been done!' About that time I had begun to meditate upon the *Sources* of Father Gratry, and took pride in following the advice he gave, never to read a newspaper. Politics bored me.

And so it was that on the evening of my fifteenth birthday, I felt ill at ease when Dindinnaud embarked upon a monologue. Gorged with the contents of a number of virulent articles in the daily press, he poured them into my ears with monotonous fluency. I tried to check the flood by talking to him of his master, whom he loved, only to find that my words gave him an opportunity to air still further his wild obsession. 'My master'—this is the gist of what he said—'is nothing now but the humble chaplain of the Ladies of the Visitation, because Archbishop Lecot is a freemason, and is removing all right-thinking men from positions of influence.' At the far end of the street, we saw the headlight of a tram. 'That is the last one'—said Dindinnaud: 'You are quite big enough to go home alone. I have several political enemies in this quarter of the town. It is better for me not to be seen about the streets after midnight.' He made a sign to the conductor, and jumped into the tram.

At first I felt a vague terror at finding myself alone; then a sense of religious joy flowed in upon me, and, little by little, raised my spirits. . . . I walked with an easy buoyancy, like one who climbs a not very steep mountain, and watches the sequence of successive horizons unveiled before his eyes. In such a way did my errant thoughts contrive a multiplicity of different lives, each one of them magnificent. I felt the bitter joy of a supreme act of surrender. In one brief moment I lived the humble life of a parish priest absorbed in his work of superintending charities and religious communities, but also officiating at early-morning Mass, my heart on fire with love incarnate as I made my meditation on the Eucharist before a kneeling congregation of the humble. I wrote a book which brought me world-wide admiration. Students, when I passed them in the streets, turned round and said 'that's him. . . .' Never had the worship of a tiny clique, such as burned incense

to my father's memory, seemed to matter so little. The school-boy who, to-night, was, for the first time, in the streets after ten p.m., craved the applause of all mankind.

As I passed Saint-Seurin again, I stopped. I should have dearly loved, at that late hour, to go into the great church, and feel its darkness, its silence and its incense-laden air about me. There, oh! how gladly, in that place of peace I would have made an offering of my heart, so bruised, so charged with scraps and memories, and, like the victor in a long-drawn battle, so wearied and exhausted. How much kinder to me than the October night would have been the walled-in darkness of this church, one tiny fragment of the greater darkness which, for centuries, had been dedicated to the service of an unseen God, a darkness dense with tears, the secret tears of Christendom, and sacrifices that the world knew nothing of, a ceaselessly triumphant darkness which no sun can dissipate, and where, even at noon, shines out the gleam of the eternal lamps. . . . A sudden wind was tearing the last leaves from off the planes, as though the tardy autumn wished, at a single stroke, to make its work complete. It had forgotten to paint with tender hues the withered foliage, to lay bright colours on the dying trees. Now was the moment when all nature could be seen laid bare. But the young schoolboy, standing in the empty square, understood nothing of that bitter lesson. Gorged full with dreams, drowned deep in a confusion of desires, he did not know that life can burn, like a black frost, the burgeoning of youthful hearts. . . . The sound of a low and eager voice made him start. A hand was laid upon his arm. A pale face, crowned with a ruin of poor feathers, was raised to his. . . . He took to his heels, the wind blowing his cape behind him. Emotion made him tremble, an emotion in which there was something sacred, because, for the first time in his life, an appeal, no matter how squalid, how sordid, had been made to him.

## XIII

It was midnight when I crossed the Place Pey-Berland. A light in Camille's window brought me the vision of a little girl lying in a narrow bed, her hands invisible beneath her scattered curls, and reading while the candle guttered to its death. Commonplace though it was, it roused a tumult in my heart. Without knowing it, I caught the fragrance of white marriage flowers, a distant scent wafted towards me from days yet to come, like that which Columbus caught long before his crew had shouted 'Land!' That consciousness of flowers with which, in the years ahead, I should fill a young girls' arms, reached me, perhaps, from the very mind of God.

I found the front-door open. Granny and Sister Marie-Henriette were waiting for me on the landing, confiding each to each their secret fears of possible catastrophe. The good Sister, when she saw me, fled away, being without her coif. For the first, and last, time in my life I saw the short grey hair which made her look like a very old little boy. My aunt was gloomily triumphant, and Granny, as she pushed me into my bedroom, said: 'Never again shall you be allowed to go out after dark!'

Why had I come back? Why had I not run on and never turned my head? I should never be alone again, and free, at night in the middle of an empty town. My father had dared to leave his wife, already close to death, and the small boy born of his body, yet I had not had strength enough to turn my back upon a half-dead grandmother, a nun whose duty kept her blind and dead, a poor old desiccated aunt! Camille, awake with

a book thought suitable to the young, had doubtless forgotten even to think of me. . . . I got up and went, barefooted to the window, which I opened. In the freezing darkness the cathedral spires and the Pey-Berland tower stood wrapped in prayer, their heads commingled with that starry choir with which, for centuries, they had held communion. It would have been no more surprising to have seen the cathedral, like a dark ship, cast off its moorings, and drive ahead through the translucent night, than to have watched a little Bordeaux boy taking a long farewell of the familiar streets and anchored persons of his home, to cross the world and reach an unknown cemetery where his father lay buried. . . . 'His love, his passion, for the light supported him'—I told myself: 'but for me there is no such support. I have no gift for painting. At best, beneath the raised lid of my desk, I scribble wretched verses which make José laugh, and what is that to compare with my father's little harvesting of fame? The longing to embrace the whole wide world is reason enough for flight. I ought not to have come home, not even on a night of late autumn when, beside the road, I should have found none of those dark stooks to sleep in, those motionless censers which perfume the summer skies.' But, at least, there would have been the wayside inns where I used to stop for a drink of lemonade after a long holiday outing, and where the muleteers sat playing cards. The smell of rancid oil, absinthe and fried bacon had always made me feel a little sick, and I would sit staring at the commercial calendars with their advertisements of chocolates and liqueurs, the names of which I had never heard. . . . The sound of steps shook me from my half-dreaming state. . . . A light showed under the door: Octavie already, come to wake me! The bell for the six o'clock Mass began to ring. . . . None of the stories of little boys making their escape were true. . . . I stood shivering on the brink of yet another gloomy day of school. . . . There had been

add my brush-stroke to God's handiwork. We can live for years with a fellow human-being without once seeing what is before our eyes. The first day I really *saw* Camille was when I came upon her asleep on the yellow sofa in the drawing-room. To her long arms and legs (which she 'didn't know what to do with'—said my aunt) she owed her resemblance to all gambolling young creatures as yet uncertain on their feet, to those fillies, for instance, who, when a train roars past, set off in a wild gallop across the fields. My official occupation of an evening in the lamplight was the study of geometry, which might have delighted me had I come upon it, like the young Pascal, as something new and strange: but, as it was, long before I had reached the thirty-second proposition of Euclid, I would slip the ill-favoured volume underneath a copy of Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint-Anthony*, a feat of almost fabulous daring since, at the further end of the room, Sister Marie-Henriette was reading aloud to grandmamma and my aunt, from an amusing story by Marlitt, *Le Secret de la vieille demoiselle*. This, though permitted reading for those of riper years, was marked by the Library with an R, which meant that it was dangerous for the young. Consequently, the reader kept her voice low, and so did not distract my attention from the intoxicating confidences made to Saint-Anthony by Helen of Troy: '*One evening, standing among the Greek sailors with a sistrum in my hands, I made them dance. The rain was falling like a cataract upon the tavern roof, and the mugs of hot wine were steaming.*'

In spite of all the ferment in my mind and senses, I still was pure, because it so happened that, about the same time, I had discovered Charles de Montalembert, Henri Lacordaire, Alexandrine d'Alopeus and Eugénie de Guérin—children of Christ as well as of this world, I thought, freed from the necessity of choosing wisely, drunk with human glory, but also with



the love of God, and finding in friendship a rarer pleasure than most men find in passion. One short passage of Henri Lacordaire's went to my head like wine. I found it in a letter which he wrote to Montalembert at the end of 1830, the year which had brought them together: *'No matter how cruel the times we live in, they cannot deprive me of the happiness which has come to me in the year just past: it will live forever in my heart like a virgin whom death has taken. . . .'* In the company of these rare souls I lived. With Lamennais' disciples I wandered through the austere privacies of La Chesnaie. I heard M. Feli, that melancholy and testy little man, thundering against the 'eunuchs of the Sacred College', and, with Henri Lacordaire I fled, one night, from the house which was, for him, to be ever more accursed. Last of all, an adolescent choked by sobs, I stood behind a pillar in Notre-Dame, while Lacordaire, in the midst of a murmuring crowd, seemed conscious only of my soul, and spoke to it: *'Scarcely have eighteen springtimes bloomed for us than we are tormented by desires which have for object neither flesh, nor love nor glory, nothing which has a name or shape or substance. Whether in the secrecy of solitude, or in the splendid streets of famous cities, the young man feels himself oppressed by aspirations, unanchored and undirected. He separates himself from the realities of life as from a prison where his heart is stifled, and asks from all things vague and uncertain, from the clouds of evening, the winds of autumn and the fallen leaves, for something that shall fill his being, though it rend his heart. . . .'*

To my neat appearance, my good morals and my piety, I owed my election as prefect of the congregation, and, on feast-days, when my turn came round to don the cassock of my rank, I officiated with a grave and youthful dignity.'

But I doubt whether these mystic angels, these romantic abbés drunk with words, would, by themselves, have been strong enough to guard my virtue. This was the more true,

since Bordeaux did not lack of small temptations cut to the measure of my guileless nature. In particular, there was upon the Quinconces, in October and in March, a most unsettling Fair. Harmless menageries and inoffensive merry-go-rounds occupied the centre of the ground. But on the outskirts was the Dupuytren Museum which I was just old enough to be allowed to enter (children under fifteen were not admitted) and this I haunted. Outside the booth a painter of genius had depicted men and women drinking champagne, served by a majordomo correctly dressed, but with the face of Death—sublime and horrid symbol! In the din of mechanical organs, and the smell of frying fish and hot caramels, I wandered from snare to snare. The woman who invited me to shoot at pipes and eggs dancing on a jet of water, had a smile which promised me still other, and different, delights. No, the romantic angels would never have protected me had not the Place des Quinconces been so near the river. I had only to go down a short flight of steps set between rostral columns, to find myself in a foreign world, on the great wharfs which held a far more lively attraction than did the noisy and suggestive Fair.

The people of Bordeaux scarcely ever ventured down to the harbour, where wild-looking men had a way of rolling barrels between the feet of casual passers-by. The enormous cranes put me in mind of Indian elephants trained in the unloading of ships. The city slept along the winding river, where the fog had the smell of the tideway, of brine and spices. Puddles of wine lay between the cobbles. The officers from off the alien ships were fair. Their wives must surely have been waiting for them in some bright Norwegian house, reading the Bible or one of Ibsen's plays. Half-drunk Breton sailors linked arms and sang, as though posed for an illustration for *Mon frère Yves*. I sat down on one of the bollards to which the ships were tied. Later, I came to know that, in the days when my father was

eating his heart out because he could not sail away into the blue, he scarcely ever left the house except to spend interminable hours sitting with his face turned to the river, and drinking in the heady smells of travel. A less tyrannical emotion kept me beside that stretch of black water in which the lighters were reflected upside down. I may not have had within me the same relentless yearning he had known to tear my roots up and escape from the gloomy, bogged-down city, but, at least, I felt with him the offensive vulgarity lurking in human beings, and the hostility they showed upon their faces.

I had yet another refuge from temptation—the abbé Maysonnave's room. When dusk or the falling rain drove me from the water-front, I spent my holiday afternoons there. I knew that when I entered it the abbé's face would light up. I could rely upon Dindinaud, when he had been reassured by a peep through the spy-hole in the door that no political enemy lurked without, to make a cup of chocolate for me with a sort of savage zeal.

Two antique armchairs, and some reproductions of pictures by Correggio and da Vinci bore witness to the fact that the abbé was not wholly indifferent to the arts. But for a long time now his interest had been confined to matters concerning the human soul, and only its salvation could excite him. His Young People's Club and the Convent of the Visitation furnished him with a spiritual reservoir, and inexhaustible fish-pond. His confessional, though never patronized by the crowds which besieged that of Father Bauni of the Society of Jesus, had a select clientèle of men. His exquisite apostolate made beautiful the small souls of the people as surely as those of rich and pious merchants. He had already infected me with his own passion for souls. But his attitude was one of absolute detachment. I, on the other hand, though I did not know it, was less moved

by love than by curiosity. But, at least, this concern of mine for cleanliness in myself and others, provided a poor field for vice to flourish in. Though I was more imaginative and sensitive than any of my comrades, a secret magic kept me firmly pent within the frontiers of the kingdom of purity.

In the abbé Maysonnave's narrow room, a tide of leaflets, journals and books floated me high above the actual concerns of every day. Nothing appealed to me more than the atmosphere of meditation which I found there. My visits bred in me a taste for long talks and shared reading with a twin spirit. I no longer saw the abbé as the rather too acquiescent frequenter of my grandmother's drawing-room, who smiled, and pretended to get excited over trivialities in return for the subsidies he needed for his Club. The articles which he contributed, under a pen-name, to the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, frequently involved him in polemics, the twists and turns of which he described to me in little bursts of violence. The essence of what he said escaped me, but the smell of powder went to my head. On the mantelpiece there stood a cast of the face of Blaise Pascal, and, long before I got to know the *Pensées*, I had learned to love the young mathematician whose life-story the abbé told me. Every detail of that sublime biography I found enchanting: the discoveries, the worldly period, the talisman sewn inside his shirt, his asylum at Port-Royal, the secluded life he led while he scattered abroad, like Greek Fire, his *Lettres à un provincial*, the miracle of the Holy Thorn. The declamations of the *Mystère de Jésus* ravished my heart, and opened a path to that supra-terrestrial love which no briars, no weeds since then have ever blocked. One day, he told me that Pascal could never bear to see his nephews being caressed by their mother. So intense a degree of austerity frightened me, and I was made miserable by the thought that Pascal would, almost certainly, never have felt love for me. 'Oh, but he

would'—said the abbé, with a smile—'just as he loved the young duc de Roannez and the chevalier de Méré. . . .'

Nevertheless, it was Pascal, eventually, who came between us. *Les Annales de philosophie chrétienne* published a long article: *De la Révélation intérieure et de l'apologétique selon Pascal*. It appeared with the pen-name of my friend, and came under the ban. The author's identity had to be revealed, and, as was customary in such cases, he was sent to a small village on the confines of the diocese, where no one ever went to Mass, and the schoolmaster, having but six pupils to attend to, spent his time in persecuting the curé. In six months the abbé had converted him, had organized a Boys' Club and a Charity School, and embarked upon an intensive study of the writings of Saint-Thomas Aquinas, with which he was imperfectly acquainted. To the letters I received from him, I replied in that indifferent tone of the young for whom, as yet, the past does not exist. Then, he entered the Benedictine Order, and vanished altogether from my life.

## XV

ONE day, our Superior, Father de Roquetaillade, much worried about my weakness in mathematics, said: 'Only four months left, my child, before the examination!' I felt as though I had been awakened from a dream. I looked at my schoolfellows with new eyes: I saw how worn their faces were, and what a number of boils they had. In the playground, the talk was only of this examiner on whom backstairs influence could be brought to bear, of that, who would most certainly resist it. Last year, the Latin unseen had been so difficult that even the experts could not make out the meaning of certain passages. From this we concluded that the text, this time, would be easier. I was in the grip of panic. Someone who knew the ropes, told me what questions M. Z . . . was likely to ask, and which were M. Y . . . 's recurrent favourites. Like Adam I had been driven from an illusory Paradise. At home, the subject of examinations was seldom mentioned in the presence of my uncle, who had never passed one in his life, and felt humiliated by any reference to the matter. But, as soon as he was safely out of the room, the old ladies made up for lost time: if only I were lucky enough to have M. Drouin who was M. Castagnède's brother-in-law, or M. Gimena, whose daughter used to go to Mlle Dumoliers' water-colour classes, or M. Lefour, who was a good Catholic and had the abbé Maysonnave as his confessor! My aunt quoted the case of the son of Mr Somebody-or-Other, who had been 'failed for a mere nothing', in spite of the fact that he had carried off all the prizes in his form! Quite often, the professors had

a prejudice against boys from the church schools. I must be careful not to wear my uniform when I went up for my *viva!* When the dread day came, Sister Marie-Henriette gave me, in a small bag, a piece 'cut from the veil of one of our community—a candidate for beatification, so they say, whose cell still holds the scent of jasmin and roses.' In the hope of stimulating me to still greater efforts, the examples of illustrious examinees were trotted out from the family annals for my admiration. There was, for instance, Arsène Ducasse, our Paris cousin, who had passed an incredible number of examinations, and taken part in numerous competitions, from which he had always emerged with praise and distinction. His son, Philippe—a boy of my own age—showed signs of following in his father's footsteps.

That year, I saw nothing of the spring. Indeed, I went so far as to accuse the soft languors of May for the sick headaches which lessened my powers of work. That Month of Mary was the occasion of novenas and special prayers. When, after the Litany, the officiating priest said in an expressionless voice: 'Your prayers are asked for the conversion of a young man, the recovery of a mother lying dangerously ill, and the success of one now sitting for his examination,' I knew that the 'one' in question was myself, and that I should have my share of the good effects of the five *paters* and the five *aves* muttered by the black-clad, kneeling congregation. Behind the Choir there was a marble statue of the Virgin before which I loved to pray. In the month preceding the examination she was playfully referred to as 'Notre-Dame du Bachot',\* and the candles of the candidates burned before Her night and day, ceaselessly renewed by many anxious mothers. I felt offended in my love for Her, fearing that this crude and temporary manifestation of devotion might cause Her pain. I had not yet realized that

\*The slang name for the baccalauréat. (Translator.)

the genius of this cult of the Mother of God is exemplified in the fact that both a Blaise Pascal and a boy sitting for an examination can find in it comfort and help.

When my written work was over, I had to go frequently to the Faculty of Letters building, with its throngs of pallid candidates, and not only candidates, for in one corner I noticed a mother deep in ejaculatory prayer. Elsewhere, a second, like the mother of Saint-Symphorien, the martyr, showing to her suffering son the celestial crown awaiting him in Heaven, was consoling her unhappy child by describing the bicycle with a free-wheel which was to be the well-earned reward of his success. A mingled smell of chemical experiments and lavatories hung about the gloomy rooms in which we crowded round one or other of our comrades undergoing his ordeal. If it be true that certain words have a smell of their own, a very special smell belongs for me to the three syllables of *secular*.

M. Malchis, the examiner in mathematics, must certainly have sown the seeds of heart-trouble in many of the Bordeaux young belonging to my generation. First, with bursts of irony and unsuppressed laughter, he produced a state of numbness in his victims, and then, with scrupulous thoroughness, proceeded to display their every weakness, like an entomologist who mounts dead butterflies on corks. The first time I saw him, I was surprised to find that he was a small, paunchy man with a jovial manner. Presumably, I thought, he eats, drinks and sleeps like other men. 'It is difficult to imagine'—wrote Vigny—'that Robespierre was once a baby in his nurse's arms, that his mother smiled on him, and people said—"what a pretty little boy!" . . .'



## XVI

WHEN the salvoes of artillery boomed out in honour of the 14th of July, I had not yet had my *viva*. But not for anything in the world would Granny have spent that day in town. She imagined every sort of horror; bacchanalian orgies, processions conducting some actress personifying the Goddess of Reason, drunken, naked women gallivanting in the streets. On the 13th, therefore, the whole household moved to Ousilanne. Though it lay only a few miles from the city, it was decided that I should not go out and sleep there, and so waste valuable time. Octavie should see to my material needs, and Mlle Dumoliers keep a watchful eye upon my conduct.

I spent the National Holiday immersed in the campaigns of Louis XIV and the topographical complexities of the Loire Valley. About seven in the evening, Mlle Dumoliers arrived, looking flushed, and with her hat awry. A drunken soldier had embraced her. Another, smelling of leather-polish, had run his large hand over her figure, from head to foot, exclaiming, as he did so:—‘Good’ . . . ‘Not so good!’ She inveighed against these republican laxities, but, during our meal, exhibited the high spirits of someone in a city taken by assault, awaiting with firmness and resignation the influx of a licentious soldiery. As a rule, I never saw her except in the company of grandmamma, my aunt and Sister Marie-Henriette, a redoubtable trinity who made it their duty to see to it that she should not depart from her normal, negative state.

I remembered that I had seen her once before like this,

talkative and unrestrained, on that 1st of January when we had spoken together about my father.

After dinner, she suggested that we should take a look at the illuminations and the fireworks. It was a hot evening. There was no wheeled traffic in the streets, along which the crowds flowed, bank-high, between the gloomy-looking houses. From sheer habit I said that I did not like crushes. All the same, freed from the trivial worries of my examination, elbowed on every side, bruised and jostled, I let myself go happily with the human tide. In a city where the bourgeoisie is the vainest and most stand-offish in all France, the lower classes hold a monopoly of wit. The exchanges which I heard all round me made me laugh until I cried. A young woman, red of face and round of body, was constantly being flung into my arms by the surging mass, and each time she uttered a squeak of terror. I was only too glad to accommodate such a fleeting morsel of delight, and offer her protection. I called her *Bérénice*, convinced that she was an incarnation of the gay and humble humour of the people. A sudden eddy in the crowd swirled *Bérénice* away. I turned my head. I saw the ostrich-plume in *Mlle Dumoliers'* hat show for a moment above the seething surge of faces, then sink and vanish. I heard the crackling of unseen fireworks, and watched the rockets leap upward in a wild disorder. A slight tickling in the palm of my hand revealed the close proximity of *Bérénice*. She had lost her parents. I complained aloud that I couldn't see a thing. A genial workman remarked that having got what I had, I had no reason to complain. *Bérénice* was thirsty. We were flung against the entrance to a tavern. We made our way among the crowded tables in a din which, though deafening, could not drown the piercing notes of a phonograph. A purple-faced soldier, with his belt undone, was making obscene remarks about the republic and his sergeant. *Bérénice* and I drank sour lemonade from the same glass. 'I'm

drinking pins' she said, 'and they're getting into my nose.' She also said, 'there's many a girl who'd like to have as white a skin as yours.' Her fingers, roughened by constant working with her needle, stroked my wrists like restless little rasps. I thought I should have died of shame when I felt in my pockets and found that I had not got so much as a penny-piece. But she expressed herself delighted to pay for the best glass of lemonade it has ever been my fortune to taste.

English dog-cart, with the youngest son of one of his estate-workers, disguised as a groom, perched on the back-seat. Then the walls gradually became dusty hedges. On the bare fields, where they could find nothing to eat, cows were staring at the evening sky, waiting to be driven back home. A motor-car went by, smothering everything in its wake, myself included, in a cloud of dust.

At last I reached the little lane which branched off to Ousilanne. As soon as I had left the mainroad I felt at home. No one, alas! was on the look-out for me. I did my best to conserve such last remnant as remained of my earlier happiness. As one rakes together in a fireplace the almost extinct, but still glowing logs, so did I try to revive the feverish excitement I had felt during the previous winter. I conjured up, for anticipatory enjoyment, an image of hot mornings on which one gathers fruit with as little delay as possible, of the prostrating heat of noon siestas, of the long-drawn-out hours of dusk, of my evening walks with Camille, so susceptible to the silent influences of summer nights, whose fear of toads kept her constantly snuggling against me, and so anxious to distinguish Vega from Lyra that she walked with her nose in the air, clinging closely to my arm. The same hour which set the mist rising from the croaking surface of the pond, drew from her heart all that flood of sentiment which Zenaïde Fleuriot had started in it, of which I was the recipient for no better reason than that I happened to be available. Anyone else would have received her offering, just as he would have breathed in the scent from the invisible flower-beds. But that I had not yet learned. . . .

I turned into the drive, to be greeted by the smell of warm figs, of the stables and the hay. I reached the bend where the coachman was always warned to 'keep a look-out for the children'. Balkis, the mare, who was said to be dying because her teeth were too long, paused in her task of turning the

mill-wheel. Octavie, at the kitchen door, received the good news with one of those kisses which testified to the fact that she had been with us for sixteen years, and had seen me on the day of my birth. As usual, the branches of the old acacia trees were scraping the window of the acacia-room. Behind the privets, where the old pigeon-house had been turned into a chapel, I could hear the voices of Sister Marie-Henriette and grandmamma busy at their *Hail Maries*. Why pass the information on to them? They would only continue their praying with the excuse that they wished to offer up thanksgiving. All the same, I could not resist the temptation to wave the little slip of white paper at them from the chapel-door. They smiled at me, but did not leave the presence of the good God. On the terrace above the main steps the wicker chairs stood in a circle, and seemed to be carrying on the old ladies' conversation. Camille turned up, crimson in the face, her hair tousled, and giving off a strong smell of sweat—kissed me, and then hurried back to the tennis-court, where my uncle was waiting impatiently to finish their match before the light went. To reach the fish-pond I had to go through the vineyard. A bonfire was smouldering between two of the rows, scenting the air and attracting the moths. The ground was stained with patches of blue sulphate. The moon, looking like a child's badly drawn version of a circle, hung suspended in the narrow space left between two neighbouring poplars. The still green paddock led downhill to the pond where, at my approach, the frogs all stopped their croaking. The rustic bridge—à la Public Gardens—gave access to the island which had seen me, once upon a time, playing at Robinson Crusoe, and saw me now weighed down under a poor little load of happiness, saying over and over again—*poor little Jacques . . . poor little Jacques. . .*

I thought of her who, in the last months of her life, used to get up in the night to watch me sleeping. I thought of him

who, at the other end of the world, had been made one with that world of nature which he had loved more fervently than he had ever loved me, his little son.

The bell rang for dinner. I made my way back to the house, filled with a sense of sadness, of sweetness and of calm, Grandmamma and Sister came to meet me. According to them, it was the Holy Spirit, speaking through my mouth, that had satisfied the examiners. During dinner, even though my uncle was present, I was compelled to speak of the examination he had always failed to pass. 'Our Paris cousin, Philippe Ducasse has also passed, but better than you'—was his rather acid comment—'he got an honourable mention.' In this way did my uncle imply that he would have rather won no diploma at all than have passed the examination as I had done. The family expressed admiration of this astonishing Philippe. All the incense which was mine by right, was burned in his honour. I gathered that he would be coming to see us in the course of the holidays. I was conscious of mixed feelings—hurt pride, timidity and pleasure. Granny said nothing. I was surprised to catch her eyes fixed on me—they had the same strange look which I had seen in them on the evening when she had sent me upstairs to try my mourning on. Though the night was hot, she did not want to sit out on the terrace, but asked me to take her to her room, which was on the first floor. On each tread of the stairs she stopped, fighting for breath. Her room combined the features of a prison and a chapel. Because of her dread of mosquitoes, she had had the windows fitted with wire screens, as small-meshed as those of a larder. She preferred living in perpetual half-darkness to being condemned to lie awake at night listening for the alarming music of mosquitoes, every pause in which meant a sting. 'I owe you some reward, my little Jacques. . . .'

She opened her desk, and from it took an envelope. I thought

—‘it’s fifty francs’. But I could read the superscription in a strange and shaky hand: *for my child*. I had a vision of a low room opening on to a darkness drowned in fragrance, and of my father, on the brink of eternity, sending me this message of farewell. Without a word, I kissed my grandmother. She told me to go to my room, where I should be alone, not to worry and to sleep well.

I held the letter to my nose, but it had kept nothing of the scent of Tahiti. I could detect only the smell of my grandmother’s clothes—naphthaline and toilet-vinegar. Finally, I set myself to read, and read again, the rather too self-consciously ‘literary’ pages, in which, without asking my forgiveness, the writer revealed to me what I had already learned from the somewhat ineffective comments of Mlle Dumoliers. Here is one passage:

My little unknown son, I am dying because I turned my back upon reality. I am dying of the sorry meed of work which I leave to my fellow-men. But you must live. Do not let your imagination roam into strange and distant lands, but find your happiness in the old familiar house, in the vineyard and the pond where, in a boat caught in a tangle of weeds, your mother and I once sat and laughed. Better for you the chaste delights of the nuptial chamber than the squalid shacks of foreign ports where men seek forgetfulness in drink. Not for you the deadly and seductive strains of music heightened by the fumes of liquor and the drumming of the dancers’ feet. Better, far, those melodies of Schumann which, on some summer’s day, a young girl will play for you in the drawing-room at Ousilanne, filled with the scent of roses. . . .

There was much more in the same vein, a sequence of pages which I read in a mood of feverish excitement, trying to draw from them the sense of those delights of which the poor man,

now dead, had begged me to remain in ignorance. But when, after a leaden sleep, I woke to see the sun streaming into my room, and heard upon the shutters the noise of stones thrown by Camille against my windows, I was, once more, only a boy just freed from the long slavery of school. That I might no longer think about my father, I shut my eyes and shook my head, as I had used to do long years ago when I had tried to drive away an evil thought.

The summer holidays had come, a time of blazing and delightful heat. I asked for nothing but those weeks of blessed happiness. When the new term came, the fascination of that letter would be with me still. During the long winter evenings I should have time, and time enough, in which to surrender to delicious melancholy. But that first day of the holidays brought me a sense of happy carelessness, of physical enjoyment and a listless ease, all of which I wanted to savour to the full, like one biting into a luscious fruit.

I threw the shutters wide, and the light so dazzled me that I had to close my eyes. Camille's face, under a huge sun-hat, was all aglow with happiness and laughter. I knew obscurely that all the joys of summer freedom would be summed up for me in that young face now turned to mine. But perhaps our still childish lips would never have murmured the blessed words but for the coming to Ousilanne of our cousin from Paris, Philippe Ducasse.



## XVIII

THAT evening, Camille and I walked along the path which circled the meadows, and was called by us the *roundabout*. The night was hot, and, now and again, shooting-stars streaked across the sky. We could not see the flowers, but I recognized the great clumps of heliotrope bordered with pinks by the mingled scent of vanilla and spice with which the darkness was drenched.

As we passed the front steps, we heard the voice of Sister Marie-Henriette:

'I rather fear that Mlle Camille may catch a chill.'

'But it is stifflingly hot, sister,' said Granny.

I felt pretty sure that my aunt was laughing. We all of us knew that Sister Marie-Henriette profoundly disapproved of our taking these walks together in the park. One day, when I was listening outside the door, I had heard her confiding her uneasiness to Granny:

'My work as sick-nurse has made me familiar with the secrets of many families, and I can assure you, madame, that an intimacy of this nature between two young people, may well have serious consequences. . . .'

'Stop talking, and don't be an old fool!'—was Granny's comment. Admirable woman though she was, she had a quick temper which came rapidly to the boil.

Sister Marie-Henriette had said no more, but she was far from easy in her mind, though God knows how completely without foundation her suspicions were! At that time I was sixteen, but I had learned from the Fathers that no young boy

dedicated to the service of the altar, and officiating on feast-days robed in scarlet, should flirt with danger. He should avoid it with as much earnestness as he would refuse to satisfy an impure curiosity.

That evening we paid no attention to the hints and implications dropped by Sister Marie-Henriette. We were on the eve of what was to turn out to be a memorable event, about which Camille could not stop talking—the arrival of our cousin, Philippe Ducasse, from Paris.

He was much the same age as we were, and we both remembered playing with him as children, which was some time before his parents had left the neighbourhood.

But we were kept regularly informed of his successes. He had won every possible prize at school: he went out to parties, and recited verses of his own composition in the drawing-rooms of Paris. The *Revue des Poètes* had actually crowned and published his *Ode to the Ideal*. Such a galaxy of glories dazzled us, and the mere fact that he lived in the capital was prestige enough in our eyes. Neither Camille nor I had any experience of the great city. "It is not very different from Bordeaux"—we had been told by Sister Marie-Henriette, who had spent the years of her noviciate there. 'Of course, the houses look taller and there are more carriages and pedestrians in the streets. Still, one city is much like another, and God is everywhere.' The thought of its many monuments did not particularly interest me: I was too much excited about other things. Why, at any moment one might see Maurice Barrès in the street! . . . It was the place where Sully Prudhomme, Henri de Regnier and Madame de Noailles lived! . . . We were familiar with the names of the streets where the characters in certain works of fiction had their homes. Camille spoke enthusiastically of the rue de Lille and the rue du Vaugirard which were so closely associated with Zénaïde Fleuriot's *Petit Chef de Famille*. I told

her that the hero of *Sous l'oeil des Barbares* had lodged on the Boulevard Haussmann.

Of this romantic Paris Philippe was, for us, the living embodiment, and Camille, in her eagerness to see him again, decided to go to bed early so as to be all the fresher next morning. We made our way back to the steps. Camille pressed her lips to her hand so that the sound of a kiss might disturb Sister Marie-Henriette's equanimity. But her intended victim had already preceded us to the chapel. Its walls were painted in soft and varied colours, and Sister Marie-Henriette and Camille made a point of frequently changing the flowers upon the altar. In so small a space, the scent of heliotrope, of roses and geraniums, mingled with the smell of incense, made me feel slightly sick, and quite often, in the middle of prayers, I felt so weak and dizzy that I had to go into the open air.

We were sensitively responsive to the presence of God in our garden, and our games of hide-and-seek became less noisy whenever they took us near the chapel. Each evening, the family gathered there for community praying. Granny and Sister Marie-Henriette had two magnificent stalls, while we children made do with simple kneeling-chairs, the rush seats of which left a pattern on our bare knees.

This evening, we had much to distract our attention. I could think only of our cousin from Paris, and when Granny spoke the final prayer—*May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace*—I realized that I had not listened to a single word.

## XIX

I WAS awakened next morning, at six, by Camille hammering on the wall with her fist. We ran down to the orchard. It was important to gather the fruit before the heat of the day, and I can still remember the joy of that summer's morning. White butterflies were hovering over the flowering shrubs. A couple of red oxen were lumbering down one of the wide alley-ways between the vines. The white grapes were not yet ripe, but we gathered a rich harvest of peaches and greengages with the bloom still on them. They were already splitting open in places, and swollen with juice. We ate a great many, reassured by the knowledge that fruit never does one any harm when picked in the freshness of the early morning.

While Camille and my aunt were busy with the flowers for the drawing-room and the luncheon table, I went upstairs to my room. I chose a resplendent tie and, though it was not Sunday, put on my cream-coloured flannel suit. I cut the few hairs sprouting on my chin with the nail-scissors. Then I went down to have a look at the dining-room.

The table, I thought, presented an imposing spectacle. Numerous little glasses stood beside each plate. Camille was carelessly scattering flowers on the cloth.

'That's all the rage in Paris,' she told my aunt, who would have preferred one large bunch in the middle.

The shutters were drawn to. Wasps were buzzing round the peaches. The freshness of the room held the scent of fruit and flowers. I looked at the plates hanging on the walls. Granny insisted that they were 'of considerable value.' I seemed to be

seeing for the first time the still-life over the mantelpiece. It consisted of a group of apples, though Granny maintained, most implausibly, that they were peaches. It was an inexhaustible subject of discussion. What, I wondered, would be the view of our cousin from Paris?

Eleven o'clock saw us all gathered on the top of the front-steps. The cicadas were scraping away. Granny dabbed at her forehead with a handkerchief dipped in toilet-vinegar. She asked my uncle whether, in Paris, the left arm was offered when going into the dining-room. The great heat was gladdening her heart, for she loved her vines.

'Good wine weather'—she said: 'I am going to let our cousins taste some of the '78. They won't find its like in Paris, I'll be bound! . . . Up there they buy wine by the bottle from the shop at the corner, even in rich houses. I well remember, during my honeymoon, being asked to luncheon by a friend of my husband's, a man in a very good position, who had his entrée to the Tuileries. Well, would you believe it, he had red wine served after the scrambled eggs, and Sauternes with the joint! I shall never forget how indignant your grandfather was. . . .'

It was so hot at midday, that no one went to meet the curé as he walked towards the steps. He was a great hulking chap from Gascony, rather common but full of zeal. I didn't much like him because he was always trying to get me to play billiards, and addressed me in the second person singular as though I had been one of the members of his Boys' Club.

'I don't suppose your cousin will be shocked if I smoke a cigar with the dessert'—he said: 'they are used to men-of-the-world parish priests who don't deny themselves the good things of this world. . . .'

We heard the sound of wheels on the gravel, and rose to our feet.

## XX

SCARCELY looked at the lady who pressed me to her bosom, or at the thin, distinguished gentleman with the heavy moustache. My eyes were all for Philippe, the cousin from Paris. He went first to Granny, took her hand and kissed it, then repeated the same performance with my aunt. Only then did he notice Camille and me. When she asked him, with a blush, whether he had had a comfortable journey, he replied:

‘The heat greatly inconvenienced us, but now, dear cousin, that I see you, all else is forgotten. . . .’

The way in which he gave her his arm when we went into luncheon, was a miracle of grace!

‘We are both the same age,’ I thought: ‘but he is a man and I am still a child.’

The Paris cousins were full of praise for the purée of woodcock, but said that they would take no wine, since they were on a diet. My uncle was in despair. Finally, to put an end to his misery, they accepted a drop of the 1893 Yquem. We fully expected an outburst of ecstatic praise.

‘A little too sugary. . . .’ said M. Ducasse.

‘What are you going to make of this boy of yours?’—my uncle asked him.

M. Ducasse looked at his son, smiled in a conspiratorial manner and winked one eye. But all he said, was:

‘The Normale I suppose, eh?’

So Philippe was destined for the Ecole Normale! In my eyes he assumed the proportions of a demi-god. He spoke little, but when he did there was a coldness in his tone. A ray of sun-

shine was playing over his black and gleaming hair. I noticed that he used both a knife and a fork for peeling his peach, and carried out that delicate operation without once touching the fruit with his fingers. I, for my part, went without a peach, fearing to display incompetence. Camille, beside whom he was sitting, was doing all she could to please him. Whenever I opened my lips, she listened with a disdainful smile. But that, I thought, was just as it should be. Philippe's superiority was beyond all question. What joy to admire wholeheartedly and to feel humble!

We went into the drawing-room. The shutters had been closed all morning, and the early freshness of the day was imprisoned within its walls. Camille, in a long muslin frock which left her arms bare, served the coffee. I noticed for the first time, with a little thrill, her girlish grace. She asked him to recite some of his poems, but he saw to it that she should press him hard before he would consent. His mother suggested *Le Chanson du Chevalier* but he chose instead *l'Ode à l'Idéal*. Granny made him sit by her good ear. Everyone applauded.

'You, too, Jacques'—said the curé suddenly—'have wooed the Muse, have you not?'

I was struck dumb with embarrassment.

'It would give me great pleasure to hear one of your compositions,' said Philippe, politely.

But Camille broke in with:

'Oh, Jacques is only an amateur.'

She is ashamed of me, I thought. No one pressed me to recite, and I felt secretly mortified. My uncle opened the shutters and remarked that we could go out now.

'The heat is less oppressive. There must have been rain somewhere.'

We went out. The dazzling light made us shut our eyes for a moment. In order to reach the pond we had to walk through

the vines which lay dozing full in the sun. Camille went on in front, and I noticed that Philippe kept his eyes fixed on the back of her neck. For the first time, the question occurred to me:—is she pretty? The heat gave an added brilliance to her tanned cheeks. Short curls clustered on her white, rather thick neck. A huge sun-hat threw her eager little face into shadow. It was as though I were suddenly discovering her. I wanted to be alone: I wanted to cry. We reached the pond. Philippe pressed me hard to read some of my poems.

‘Oh well, then, go ahead, Jacques: perhaps he’ll be able to give you some hints!’

This piece of impertinence from Camille decided me, and I took the small notebook in which I did my scribbling, from my pocket. At this time Musset and Sully Prudhomme were my gods. I chose one which was filled with echoes of Fortunio’s song and *Les Vaines Tendresses*. I had written it with no thought of Camille, but I read it now, saying to myself,—‘it is for you.’ I still remember the opening verses:

*Je ne veux que ta pensée—  
Ton amour, je n’ose pas.  
Je veux te parler tout bas  
Sans que tu sois offensée.*

*Je suis le pauvre qui guette  
Si ton coeur n’est pas fermé,  
Et je veux que tu regrettes  
De ne pas pouvoir m’aimer.*

*Et si mon regard se noie  
Dans le soir désenchantant,  
Mon humble coeur est content  
De ces parcelles de joie.*



*Une larme, un sanglot même,  
Causés par toi, sont bénis,  
En voulant bien que je t'aime,  
Tu me donnes l'infini.*

Philippe, his head bent, smiled and expressed his approval.

'Don't you think'—asked Camille who had been showing signs of impatience—'don't you think it's just a piece of doggerel?'

I turned away, that she might not see the tears in my eyes. Philippe, feeling embarrassed, said nothing. A fresh little breeze had just died away among the poplars, in a quiver of leaves. The surface of the pond was wrinkled. The sunshades of the ladies, who were looking for us, showed above the vines.

That evening, for prayers, Sister Marie-Henriette lit all the candles in the chapel. I noticed that Philippe remained standing with his arms crossed, and did not join in the responses. 'Perhaps he has lost his faith,' I thought. I hope that God has forgiven my pious and scrupulous self for finding him more glamorous even than before.

'How beastly you were, Camille!' I said to my cousin in a low voice, as we went up to bed. All she answered was 'good-night' and went into her room.

A storm burst during the night. After a particularly loud clap, the thunder seemed to be moving away, and sounded now at rarer intervals. I opened the window and listened to the rain dripping from the leaves. I breathed in the smell of the moistened earth and the freshened shrubs.

There was a light in Camille's window. I knew that she had lit the Candlemas taper which gives protection against storms. The rain had stopped. The sky was already growing light. I fell asleep.

## XXI

**B**y next morning the temperature had dropped. A lot more cousins looked in on us, and we were able to have a really large-scale game of hide-and-seek. But I took part in it without enthusiasm. The drooping-lily poses in which Camille chose to indulge, and the tone of her voice when she spoke to Philippe got on my nerves. Just as the three of us were setting off by the 'roundabout', she said:

'It is impossible for me, here, to find any food for my literary interests. . . .'

'Oh, Camille!'—I could not help protesting—'You know that we often read Musset and Baudelaire together! Haven't I copied out some of the poems from *Fleurs du Mal* for you?'

She did not answer me, but turning, instead, to the cousin from Paris, said:

'Jacques is only a kid, you know, and doesn't understand everything he reads to me. . . .'

So, it was with a very sad heart that I looked about, after luncheon, for somewhere to hide. I knew that the house was out of bounds, but I wandered from room to room, all the same, suffering as I had never suffered before. Camille had left the door of her bedroom open, and I went in. Only a very little daylight filtered through the closed shutters. It was a typical country-house room, with a mirror over the mantelpiece, and some Louis-Philippe chairs, like the ones to be seen in Eugène Lamy watercolours. On the wall there was a painted plaster Virgin, several cotillon favours, and the picture of a

young man bidding farewell to a carrier-pigeon in the following delightful words:

*Pars, confident discret, mais dans le voyage  
Evite le chasseur et le cruel vautour.  
Souviens-toi que ton rôle est de servir l'amour,  
Et qu'un baiser d'Agnès est le prix du message.*

There was also a portrait of the Prince Imperial, looking like a curly sheep, receiving the petition presented by a Grenadier, with the comment: '*I will give this to my father!*'

I stood there for a moment, breathing in the smell of eau-de-Cologne and old cretonne which filled the dusk. I could hear, down in the garden, the running feet of the players, laughter and cries. Suddenly I recognized Philippe's voice:

'I've caught her!'

I went to the window. He was holding Camille by the wrists. She was out of breath, and her head was thrown back, so that all I could see was her rounded neck and half-open mouth. My suffering was terrible! I sat down on a chair in front of a small mahogany desk. My eyes were caught by a notebook. I recognized Camille's sprawling handwriting. On the cover was a title in capital letters: MY DIARY, CONTINUED, SUMMER HOLIDAYS, 19 . . . I forgot everything but my longing to read the precious document. About certain faults I may have been very scrupulous, but I was far from scrupulous about offending against those good manners which the world judges more harshly than does God. At this period of my life I read with interest only letters which were not addressed to me, because I found it easy to admit the sin of curiosity to my confessor. All the same, I decided to take a look only at the page at which the notebook lay open. . . .

Camille's voice once again sounded from the garden, but this time there was a note of fury in it.

'Let me go! you're hurting!'

I left the notebook where it was, and ran to the window. Philippe had still got hold of her by the wrists. He was laughing in a stupid sort of way, and I saw that he was trying to kiss her. A second later I had joined them. At sight of me the cousin from Paris hastily released her, saying in a very off-hand voice:

'I expect you think me a bit of a tease, don't you, cousin?'

But there was not so much as a hint of an indulgent smile on Camille's face. Maintaining an obstinate silence, she averted her narrow, stubborn forehead under its cluster of short curls. A few drops of sweat upon her neck caught the light. Her hands, hanging at her sides, were gathered into two bright red fists, and her little girl's sun-hat lay upside-down at her feet, looking like a dead bird.

Philippe, with complete nonchalance, assumed his man-of-the-world pose. The moment of departure, he seemed to be saying, was approaching, and these last few minutes should be devoted to my grandmother. Off he lounged. His beautifully brushed hair had not become deranged in the struggle and the back of his head displayed a faultless parting which reached right down to his starched collar.

The sparrows were making a great deal of noise, as they always do in the evening. The high-pitched voice of our cousin from Paris came to our ears in little bursts, and we could hear the gusts of laughter with which the ladies were greeting his witty sallies. Camille took my hand. We turned the corner of the house and followed the path which led to the domestic quarters and the outbuildings. A strong smell of figs filled the air. Camille pushed open the door of a derelict green-house where the heat was stifling, and with the suddenness of a little girl burst into tears on my shoulder. At that moment I guessed that she loved me, and ceased to worry about the rudeness with which she had earlier behaved to me. Had she been

deliberately trying to make me jealous, so that I might the more plainly reveal the warmth of my feelings?—or had she been simply imitating the heroines of those insipid stories which were thought to be suitable reading for the young, who always pretend to detest the one man whom they really adore? Not that it mattered. The sounds of that perfect evening were all about us. From the distant tennis lawn we could hear the cries of 'play' and 'ready' of the unseen players. Camille's curls were almost within reach of my lips. Terribly embarrassed though I felt, I realized confusedly that this moment was the most precious of all the moments of my life, and I dared not make a movement.

When darkness fell, we could see through the shrubbery, the lamps of the victoria which was to take our cousins back to the station. There was not much enthusiasm in our farewells. The wheels grated on the gravel surface of the drive. Then, once more, silence reigned.

'Shall we take a turn on the roundabout?'—said Camille.

We walked side by side, saying nothing. This night, like its predecessor was hot, and shooting-stars streaked the firmament. The hall-lamp made a patch of light upon the terrace.

'Let's sit down for a bit'—said Camille in a very low voice.

There was a bench close to the great massed display of heliotrope and pinks. I took Camille's hand in mine, and felt the weight of her head upon my shoulder.

The sound of Sister Marie-Henriette's voice reached our ears.

'Madame, it is time to tell the children to come in. . . .'

## XXII

THE holidays were drawing to a close, and already the grape-harvest was over. I could not any longer loiter with Camille in the garden after dark. But there were still family prayers in the chapel. Sister Marie-Henriette would go ahead with a lantern, because of the puddles, followed by grandmamma, looking enormous in her collection of shawls, and leaning heavily on my arm.

Heliotropes and pinks no longer stood upon the altar, but the early chrysanthemums filled the chapel with a fragrance which had always evoked for me the end of the holidays and the beginning of a new term. In the times now past we used to accept with happy hearts the melancholy of the last fine days. When, after our two months' absence, the city cobbles made the windows of the landau shake, we used to say:—'How tall the houses are!' We rediscovered with delight the smell of fog and roasting chestnuts. The shop windows were all lit up, and, in our quarter of the town, we were familiar with each one of them. Sister Marie-Henriette made new 'jackets' for our school-books out of different-coloured papers.

I used to think, with a little thrill of excitement, that I was going to see once more my dearest friend, José Ximénès, who was always being punished for not taking part in the school games. During the holidays I had scarcely thought of him at all. But suddenly, I found my friendship waiting for me, like my stamp-collection and my books, with the same joy that I had felt when I had left them on the evening of Prize-Day.

But this year Camille cried as she counted the days. Our love

had been born of the summer weather, now behind us, and Sister Marie-Henriette had had good reason for worrying when, on September evenings, Camille and I sat side by side. Yet, our eyes had looked at nothing but the sky in which I could point out to my dear companion, that Vega, in the constellation of the Swan, which we liked to think was our own particular star.

Through the mist of those last mornings, we wandered in the now leafless orchard, gathering up the small black grapes scorned by the harvesters. They were hard, and the mist had turned them icy-cold. There were still a few figs, but they were watery and had lost the delicious taste of those warmed by the sun, for which we had struggled with the bees. On the day before we left for Bordeaux, we made a few farewell visits to the sodden garden—to the green-house where, on a stormy August evening, Camille had cried upon my shoulder: to the fruit-store where, so often, at four o'clock, she used to offer me the peach into which she had already bitten, so that I might find there the sweetness of the lips I was forbidden to touch with mine. We breathed in the fragrance of the pears we loved so much. Great bunches of white grapes hung from a string stretched across the room, for Granny liked to boast that she could have grapes to eat at Christmas. Last of all, we went into the chapel, which the good God would have to leave, just before we left ourselves. But the lamp showed that He was still there. Sister Marie-Henriette had gathered all the flowers and plants still left in the garden, as a gift to Him: late roses, sage and dahlias. Never had the darkness of the chapel so charmed my melancholy. Camille said a decade of her rosary. The Virgin over the altar smiled down on us, and I felt her blessing fall on our young love—pledge of all purity, preserver from all soiling.

In the carriage, on our way back to the city, Granny and

Sister Marie-Henriette dozed with their rosaries between their fingers. Camille said: 'How far apart from one another we shall be, and yet, how close!' That was true; for in the same Bordeaux suburb only a single street divided the Convent of the Sacred Heart where Camille was to be confined, from the College of the Fathers where I was to complete my education. The trees of the two parks met above this street and made of it a shady avenue, and the bells of the two chapels mingled their notes. Among my new companions there were many who had sisters in the nearby convent, where, each week, they were admitted into the parlour, under the watchful eyes of one of the Fathers, to embrace them. But Camille was only my cousin, and we could hope for no such favoured treatment. It had been decided that I should be a boarder and so have more time to work for my philosophy course. In this connexion, the hints let drop by Sister Marie-Henriette had carried weight with grandmamma, though the new arrangement made me cry like a little boy, for all my sixteen years.

I remember the day when we said good-bye, a rainy day which made more gloomy than ever the interminable Mass of the Holy Ghost, and the beginning of term essays in every class. But a deal of pride was mingled with my sadness: was I not the only one of all my fellows to bear within my breast so delicious and so rare a torment? For the first time in my life I felt myself no whit inferior to José Ximénès.

Until then, I had been both attracted and humiliated by his melancholy grace, his disdainful silences, and a certain air of mystery which I vainly tried to imitate. The suicide of his father outside the house of a famous actress, the madness of his mother who had had to be shut away after a life of many loves and much luxury—these dramas which we discussed between ourselves in undertones, made José Ximénès romantically attractive. I was proud, now, to think that I, too, had a



secret to impart, in exchange for his occasional confidences, and when Camille gave me a miniature from which her ardent, narrow little face smiled out, I dared not admit, even to myself, that the greater part of my happiness came from the thought that I could show it to José.

Our friendship had started with our First Communion. I can remember what a lovely day it was, and that when José Ximénès came back from the altar rails, his sobs had been so violent that they distracted my thoughts—a grievous fault which I later had to confess. While one of us recited the *Acts following communion*, indicating the appropriate attitudes, José covered his face in his hands, and the tears ran between his fingers. He took to communicating every Sunday, as did the rest of us. We accomplished this duty with gravity, but without enthusiasm, for we had not yet received the gift of tears. José, on the contrary, wept silently, and remained, for a long time after we had left, before the altar, silently, and as though in a trance. None of the younger boys dreamed of smiling. We thought that God had chosen José from amongst us all, in order to raise him, like Louis de Gonzaga, to the high peak of a peculiar perfection. I do not think, to-day, that our good masters ever entertained that hope. They were apprehensive of his silence, of the proud melancholy which he confided to nobody. The Prefect of Studies complained of the stubbornness he showed in never joining in the community games. It was, in fact, our shared hatred of football that had first brought us together, and while the others milled about on the field, we found our pleasure in talk.

One Sunday, much surprise was felt that he had not communicated. On the following Sunday he again abstained, and the whole house was filled with whispers and suppositions. But José was too proud to take notice of the excitement he was causing. He suddenly ceased frequenting the Sacraments,

except on the major festivals, and this attitude of his betrayed, according to the Prefect of Studies, a great aridity of spirit. I tried to get an explanation from him. At first he would say nothing, but one day, in the dusk of a four o'clock recreation period, he alluded to the matter, unasked. 'I cannot'—he said—'bring myself deliberately to deceive God. In my fervent communions I pretend to be thinking only of Him, though I know, perfectly well, that I am thinking only of myself. It is such a wonderful feeling to be emotionally moved in chapel. . . .' Until the end of his rhetoric period, he made several attempts to build up a number of friendships. It seemed as though he were trying to make each one of them infinite in duration and content. But sooner or later he gave them up, as he had given up frequent communions. 'When I grow attached to anyone'—he told me one evening—'I delude myself into believing that his soul will be the better for having known mine. The truth is, that I play with him as with a toy, and all that remains is a sense of my own hypocrisy—like a burned-out firework, from which no one but I has derived any benefit.' At the time I am speaking of there was something almost excessive about the romantic beauty of his person. He seemed to be emotionally unsusceptible. During the Easter holidays, which we spent together at the house of his uncle Celamare, Conception Ximénès, who was his sister, invited a young girl she knew, with red hair and a temperament, to share in our games. This girl would climb trees in the most reckless and embarrassing manner, and shed her clothes when the weather was too hot. José paid not the slightest attention to her, but retained the impassive air of a taciturn prince.

Such was José Ximénès, and no one could have been more worthy to receive my first confidences of the heart. One day, after having put the finishing touches to our performance of the liturgical chants prescribed for All Saints' Day, we were

given a recreation period, during which I ventured to show him Camille's miniature.

'I know Camille'—he said, quite simply: 'I see her in the convent parlour when I visit my sister, Conception.'

'Oh! lucky José!'—I exclaimed: 'Alas! the bell to which I am listening at this moment, is a signal for her to put her books back in her desk, and to follow her silent companions to the chapel. She is further from me, where she is, than if all the seas of the world lay between us.'

José smiled:

'Titus and Berenice!'—he murmured.

*Comment suffrions nous,  
Seigneur, que tant de mers me séparent de vous,  
Que le jour recommence et que le jour finisse  
Sans que jamais Titus puisse voir Berenice? . . .*

He appeared to be deep in thought: but after a few moments, he said:

'You know how impossible it is for me to abandon myself utterly to any love—how I am always fearing to be my own dupe. I can only serve the love of others. Your passion seems to me to be sincere. I should like to do something to procure your happiness.'

I expressed my gratitude, and asked in what way he thought that he could help me.

'I will get your letters to Camille through my sister Conception. . . .'

Hope and terror flowed in on me at the same moment.

'But, José'—I exclaimed—'think of the appalling scandal should we be discovered!'

'Have you ever known'—he said proudly—'of any affair of love being conducted without some degree of danger?' . . .

I raised no further objections, and, that very evening, after our walk, wrote to Camille.

Camille, for your sake I am prepared to risk my own good name as an exemplary pupil, by virtue of which I have been awarded the presidency of the congregation for this year. But the thought of the perils to which I may be exposing *you* torments me. I have an idea that your Superior, Mme de Vatêmesnil is a dragon if ever there was one. . . .

I had to break off at that moment, Camille. My friend, José Ximénès gave me a nudge with his elbow. But for his doing so, I should not have noticed that Father Charlin had come down from his dais and was directing a sidelong look at me. I just managed to slip this letter into my Latin-French dictionary. Ah! Camille, what hatred I feel just now for this College which once I loved so dearly! . . . The memory of the holidays still glows in my heart. I find pleasure now only in those long chapel ceremonies at which, upright among the kneeling choirboys, I slowly swing the censer, praying the while for you, so that, without sin, I may keep you in my thoughts. . . .

A regular correspondence began between us, thanks to Conception and José. It was a source of delight for both of us, and was not discovered. At Christmas, and again at Easter we were together. Under the watchful and suspicious eyes of Sister Marie-Henriette, and when we sat with Granny, our love continued undisturbed. It was our secret, and the very air of mystery in which it lived and breathed, made it all the stronger. We re-read our letters in the stripped and wintry garden. When the day of parting came, we found consolation in talking of the coming summer, and of our clandestine communications. . . . In July I should get my degree, and after that there would be nothing to keep me from Camille.

## XXIII

ON a certain Thursday in June, God so willed it that Mme de Vatêmesnil should go poking her nose into the desks of her charges. The state of muddle in Camille's attracted her attention. She came upon a small box, similar to those which all the other boarders had, and she would probably not have opened it, had not Camille taken away the key. As it was, my beloved's caution led to her undoing. A box so carefully shut and secured was too great a temptation to be resisted by one whose duty, no less than her tastes inclined to curiosity. The box disappeared up the Superior's sleeve. One of her nuns, who was employed in doing the coarsest work in the convent, forced the lock.

You were expecting the worst, madame. You doubtless thought that you would find some forbidden book, or a collection of letters from Camille's girl-friends. But when you realized that the handwriting was that of a male, when you read these words: *Oh! my beloved, my mind is full of that blazing Autumn day when, in the stifling conservatory at Ousilanne, I took you in my arms . . .* Then, indeed, you were seized upon by the most hideous imaginings, and your assistant, for the first time in her life, saw a spot of colour show in your pallid cheeks!

When, however, you had summoned up sufficient strength to read a few of the letters, you decided that the evil was not so great as you might, at first, have feared, and that though the two young creatures were familiar with the language of passion, the reality was still a mystery to them.

All the same, Mme de Vatêmesnil came to the conclusion that the situation was grave enough to make it necessary not to awaken Camille's suspicions. She contented herself, therefore, with keeping a watchful eye on her. The box was put back into the desk, and the young girl was none the wiser. It was I who first came to learn of this act of treachery, and in the most unexpected manner.

On the following Saturday, I went, as usual, during evening prep, to make my confession. This was always, for me, an exquisite pleasure. In the first place, it got me out of doing my prep, and left me free, on my way to the chapel, to loiter in the dark passages, to press my face to a window which looked onto the park, and to see the star rising at which Camille, perhaps, was looking at that moment. Sometimes, José Ximénès would find me there, and then we stayed together for a long time, talking. The least word which fell from his lips held for me a wealth of mystery. He conjured up before my eyes that vision of Parsifal and Kundry which had haunted him ever since a visit to Bayreuth which he had once made with his mother. He quoted lines of poetry, and never, since then, has any human voice so thrilled me as did his. Thanks to him, I came, at the age of sixteen, to know and love Baudelaire and Mallarmé, Verlaine and Jammes. But sooner or later the glimpse of a cassocked figure would send us scuttling, and I would go into the chapel, there to examine my conscience. The daylight was swallowed up in the vaulted ceiling. Several of our masters were in their stalls, some, with heads bowed, humbling themselves before God; others, staring fixedly at the Tabernacle. In the semi-darkness dense with prayer, I could feel the breath of all those ardent colloquies. The unblemished wax, the faint smell of incense and the carved leafwork of the pillars composed an atmosphere in which I loved to linger. After a while, I made my way to Father de Roquetaillade's door, and

gently knocked. Being the Superior of the College, he heard few confessions. But I was president of the congregation of the older boys, and his most beloved son. He had, therefore, consented to act as my director.

On the evening in question, I heard the sound of voices as I approached his study. The Father was not alone. I walked up and down the passage reciting to myself the Acts of Resolution, but what was my amazement suddenly to hear my name and Camille's spoken in shrill tones, and then these words uttered by Father de Roquetaillade in a louder voice than he usually employed:

'Madame, there is really nothing to make a fuss about!'

The door opened, and I had only just time enough to step back into the shadows. Madame de Vatêmesnil passed me, her head held proudly under its black veil, and followed by the Father on whose bony face there was the same look of annoyance which I have since noticed in the portraits of Fénélon.

I slipped into the room. A photograph of Pius X gave me a welcoming smile. On the mantelpiece, under a glass bell, I saw a white silk skull-cap which had been worn by Leo XIII. I had not a thought in my head. The June dusk hung motionless above the park. Black roofs hedged the playground. Sparrows were cheeping round the crumbs left over from our afternoon snack. I tried to follow with my eyes the darting flight of one particular swallow. But there were too many of them: they grew confused and disappeared against the deep blue of the sky in which there was the pale slip of a moon. Across the way, in the convent, the tinkling of a bell filled the evening air. Camille's name came to my lips. I imagined her to myself facing the redoubtable Madame de Vatêmesnil. I saw her compromised and humiliated. Sobs choked me. There was a prie-Dieu close beside me. I dropped to my knees and hid my face in my folded arms. A hand was laid upon my head.

I got up. Father de Roquetaillade was standing before me, looking taller than usual in the gathering dusk.

'I came to make my confession. . . .' I stammered . . . 'and I saw Madame de Vatêmesnil come out of your room. . . .'

The Father looked at me without saying a word. He opened a cupboard and put on his surplice and his stole, after first kissing them. Then, in a neutral voice:

'Are you ready, my son?'

He raised his hand in blessing, while I murmured:

'Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. . . .'

When I rose from my knees, he again laid his hand upon my head, and looked at me with so much kindness, that I was moved to kneel.

'My son,' he said, 'I have Madame de Vatêmesnil's promise that your cousin shall not be disquieted, and that she will inform only your grandmother who already knows about your feelings, from Sister Marie-Henriette. That is why, my son, as soon as your examination is over, you will spend three months in Germany. . . .'

He hesitated for a moment before adding:

'You will leave without seeing again the young girl whom you think you love. . . .'

I found myself back in the passage. At the far end a wide bay-window framed a scrap of the night-sky. I pressed my forehead to the glass, dazed by the tumult of joy which the announcement of my coming journey had let loose in me. A thousand confused desires possessed me. I imagined the night in a Munich theatre when I should surrender to the magic of the *Good Friday Music*. Camille was already no more than a small, dead figure in my past. For the first time I found but little mystery in José Ximénès. I understood his terror at never knowing more than the simulacrum of love. For the first time I was afraid of myself.



## XXIV

NOTHING could diminish my pleasure, not the miniature from which Camille smiled out at me, nor the re-reading of those letters with which I had blundered into deluding myself, though they had very soon become boring. Did I still love her, or was all that a thing of the past? This new and tormenting problem I put to José Ximénès. 'There is in all of us'—he said—'infinitely more than ourselves. The little boy you used to be, the little Catholic Bordeaux boy, brought up in a house in the Place Pey-Berland, will always love his cousin Camille. But you are also the son of a man for whom Bordeaux was never more than a smoky port in which one lingers for as short a time as possible, a roadstead filled with ships setting out for the West Indies. . . .' I was surprised by this allusion to my father. I asked whether he knew his pictures. He told me that he had much admired a strange painting, signed with my name, which he had seen at Saint-Sebastian, in the house of his uncle Cellamare, who was an attaché in the embassy. 'I found it disturbing'—he said—'though I have the feeling that I shall one day come to love it. The universe created by your father is difficult of access. For the moment, I can do no more than prowl around its frontiers. The effect of that particular canvas, like that of certain kinds of music, is to humiliate me, to remind me that I am still only a child. . . .' So did José speak to me in one of those evening periods of recreation when the day-boys had gone home, and we were allowed the freedom of the park. The school yard was empty, like the stage of a theatre after the curtain has fallen. I asked

him whether he thought that my father's achievement would one day be generally acknowledged. He did not think so. 'There is nothing in his pictures of that vulgarity in which the average person can feel at home,' he said: 'and it is better so, Jacques. You long to achieve fame, and it is well that you should not be hampered by bearing a celebrated name.' This single comment freed me from the anguish which I had felt at the thought that my father was unknown or misunderstood. 'It is I who will reveal his work to the world'—I declared with a touch of boastfulness: 'but, tell me, José, don't you, too, want to be famous?'

He lit a Virginian cigarette, and its pungent smell mingled strangely with the fragrance of the limes: (our philosophy examination was very near, and our masters were riding us on a loose rein). 'I imagine'—he answered—'that if one is to conquer in the hustle and bustle of the market-place, one must will that conquest passionately. Do I?—that is the question I ask myself. Do I, surrounded by all the philosophies, all the music, all the pictures of the world, feel genuine concern for anything but knowing and feeling? I remember being taken, as a small boy, to a London Music-Hall. A man on the stage was keeping the audience in a roar by breaking plates. He let a whole pile of them crash to the ground, in order to catch one which his assistant threw to him. In just such a way, if we are to adopt one single system, we can do so only by sacrificing thousands of other systems.'

I listened to my friend's voice. I listened to it for its own sake, as though it were a familiar symphony. He started to laugh, poking fun at his own words. 'That's all literary bla-bla, you know, Jacques. Systems are not likely to bother me, since I already have certainty within my grasp. . . .' No doubt he was referring to his faith, which was very lively, though he never much liked talking about it. 'Do you remember how

we used to laugh together'—he went on—'over that *Manual of Philosophy* by Father Lahr, which we were given to read last October? After summing up each system in the simplest possible words, he adds a clinching formula in italics. *This is false for three reasons: firstly . . . etc.* Then, with complete assurance, he concludes with: *Here is the true solution.* Oh, yes, we laughed, but that was because we were a couple of young fools, Jacques. A little common sense, backed by a little faith, will give us something very like Father Lahr's piercing view of all the aberrations of the human mind. For me, not metaphysical misgivings, nor the posturings of the tormented spirit, will bar the road to fame. Then what is it? I have an idea that all this business of fame is a mockery, that it doesn't really cut any ice. My beloved Charles de Montalembert, on one occasion, after he had delivered a speech in the House of Peers which has since become famous, at the age of twenty-two, wrote in his diary: 'Well, I have had my fill of fame—but what, after all, does it amount to in terms of human happiness?' I don't think that the craving for success can long serve as a prop to minds of our quality. What drives *them* forward is that same terrible power which took your father from the cradle in which you were lying—in other words, a sense of vocation! But I am conscious of nothing likely to beckon me on to an uncommon destiny. . . .'

All that I could see of my friend, just then, was his forehead, the vague blur of his face and one hand.

Under the dense darkness of the trees our schoolfellows were talking in low voices. We could see motionless groups, and faces turned upward to the Great Bear. The smoke of invisible cigarettes gave an artificial fragrance to the night. We walked like shades under the immortal myrtles, and the silent and deserted yard was an image of the life which we were leaving behind us—a strange period, when, no longer schoolboys but

not yet emancipated, still close to boyhood but already shaken by the passions of grown men, we wandered like ghosts out of time and out of space.

After the written examination was over, one torrid afternoon, José took me to a bull-fight. At first he bemoaned the spectacle of the black and gloomy crowd, unbroken by the glitter, as in his own country, of snow-white mantillas and flowers, diversified by the fluttering of a thousand fans. But after the *paseo* with its barbaric splendour had come and gone, he became deaf to the imbecile comments all around us. The savage joy he was feeling found expression in a fierce and guttural Spanish. He stamped his feet and stretched applauding arms to Bombita standing beside the stricken bull. The arena showed against the sky as a circle of dark blue, above which the frightened swallows were flying high. It soothed my aching eyes, dazzled by the glitter of the sand with its patches of dark blood. I deliberately conjured up a vision of the evening meal at which so soon I should be sitting in the dining-room of the house in the Place Pey-Berland, with its open windows and murmurs of familiar talk. José was shouting at my side. He threw the cornflowers from his buttonhole into the arena. A slate-coloured silk handkerchief, smelling of cyclamen and geranium, for a moment perfuming the air, made me forget the shrieking crowd, and the horse lying on the sand, its old body still quivering.

## XXV

M BARBE, the Vicar-General, who was presiding at the solemn ceremony of Prize-Day, rose to his feet. His rounded phrases filled the air for three-quarters of an hour, while the sun, already high, blazed down upon the gasping audience. The leaves of the plane-trees hung motionless. The banners stirred gently in a breeze which failed to reach our faces. The French and Papal flags intermingled their hostile and contrasting colours. An impatient cicada sounded a prolonged and scraping prelude. We heard the string of a violoncello snap. The Vicar-General resumed his seat, and hid his thin-lipped mouth behind his handkerchief. It reappeared, fixed in the official smile which it did not abandon until the ceremony was over.

The orchestra played *If I Were King* and *Voyage en Chine*. I, a Bachelor of Arts but one day old, was present for the last time as a pupil at the distribution of prizes. Among all the assembled faces, I recognized Granny's framed in the mauve ribbons of her bonnet. For the sole purpose of placing, for the last time, a wreath of gilded paper on her grandson's head, she had emerged from the room in which she spent her days absorbed in work and prayer. Sister Marie-Henriette sat beside her with lowered eyes, as though the rule of her Order compelled her to deny the existence of the outside world. Her black-gloved hand rose now and again to hold a bottle of salts to Granny's nose.

I listed in my mind the causes of my melancholy. Next morning, a first-class railway carriage would carry me off to Paris,

far from that Ousilanne which, on the first day of the holidays, had always welcomed me. I remembered how, in July, the raked hay lay scattered over the fields, scenting the evening air, and how, each morning, the sunlight was so dazzling when I woke that, at first, I could not open my eyes. It was the season when the last of the apricots, still warm to the touch when gathered beneath the tree, tasted of incense and dried rose-leaves. How delicious to have nothing to do but to do nothing! How lovely to enjoy one's siesta on a sandy bank, watching through half-closed eyes a myriad luminous circles rising into the blue!

But more than anything else I regretted my evening strolls with Camille. In order to put an end to our young love, Granny, on the advice of Father de Roquetaillade, was sending me to Paris, and thence to Germany. And because, for the last year, we had indulged in secret letter-writing, I was to leave without seeing her again, without even giving her a farewell kiss. That was our only punishment. At first I had thought it mild and kindly, but now, when the moment had come to submit to it, I found it barbarous.

The last wreath had been set upon the last head, and the blaring of the band died away in the stifling air. I looked at José Ximénès. Though, like the rest of us, he was seated on a narrow bench covered in scarlet velvet, there was something so easy in his grace, that he gave one the impression that he was reclining on a sofa. Already, family groups were gathering round each boy, preparatory to going home.

'Since you will have no chance of seeing Camille again'—said José—'what do you say to spending this last day with me?'

He was to catch the night express to the south, on the way to join his uncle, the attaché, and go on with him to Saint-Sébastien, where the Court was in residence.

'Let us not ape our crude companions who are happy in the

thought of leaving the college for ever behind them'—he said: 'let us, rather, stay here after all the others have gone. . . .'

Granny and Father Roquetaillade acceded more than willingly to this whim of mind to stay with José until nightfall, because it would keep me from Camille. We excused ourselves from going to the refectory, wishing to be left alone, and because José had persuaded me that no intoxication can compare with that of fasting.

The college park was filled with silence, and with that sense of solitude which would reign there all through the holidays. We plunged into the shade of the trees in spite of the terrible heat which weighed them down. The smell of sap from the trodden grass went to our heads, and the immense vibration of innumerable insects made us dizzy. At the far end of the park, at the edge of a grove of chestnuts, we stretched ourselves upon the ground. José did not speak, but his eager face was alight with joy. Knowing, as I did, his taste for odd and romantic situations, I felt sure that he was savouring to the full this moment on the threshold of adolescence with its long tale of days to come. He said that we had first come to know one another when both were worthiest of love, and were parting now when life was about to bruise us, and smirch our innocence with secret impurities. So, each, in his friend, would keep the image of imperishable youth.

'It will be but a short while before we shall already bear the marks of life'—he said: 'one line, scarce visible, at the corner of the mouth, is enough to reveal to me, in a young face, the oncoming of age and all the ugliness in store.'

Since the sun was now going down, José wanted us to read something together for the last time. He told me of a passage he knew in which one who had best practised the art of friendship had expressed it in words of the purest passion. Then, taking from his pocket a book into which he had copied some of

Father Lacordaire's letters, he began to read in a voice which, though hushed, held a warmth which truly transmitted the secret feelings of the heart.

The time to which the letter he had chosen referred was when the highly-strung Lamennais had decided to go to Rome, there to protest against the verdict of the Holy Father. Montalembert, in all the proud fidelity of his twentieth year, wished to stay with him, and, in the course of the homeward journey, abandoned Henri Lacordaire. Hurt in his tenderest feelings, Henri made a stop at Milan, from which place he addressed to his lost friend an appeal, the rending beauty of which the voice of José Ximénès most admirably conveyed. I can still remember how that letter began:

When I reached Milan in the evening, after not having seen you for a week, and having never ceased, for a single moment, to think of you, I had a fire lit in my room, ate my dinner, read my breviary, and, looking at my watch which marked eight o'clock, rejoiced to think how long a time I had in which to write to you. It never so much as occurred to me to go and look at the white marble cathedral in the dusk. But when I set my elbows on the table, and remembered all I had to say to you, I was filled with so profound a feeling of distress, that I found it impossible to write a line, or even to touch my pen. I shed bitter tears. . . .

José spoke to me for a long while of those magnificent young people whom Christ had chosen after 1830: Henri Lacordaire, Charles de Montalembert, Maurice de Guérin, Albert de la Ferrounays and Alexandrine d'Alopeus, beautiful names which filled me with a glow of sadness by their evocation of those Christian and romantic years from which, all my life, I should be an exile.

We seemed charmed into immobility, as though the great



trees which had known us as young boys, could not resign themselves to our departure. They looked down, a throng of high-piled crests upon the walls on which we were about to turn our backs. They knew what we knew not.

A clock struck the hour. José went with me to the gate. Like someone leaning over an abyss I looked for a moment into the darkness of his eyes, shot through with a flicker of light. He took my hand and gently pushed me towards the road. As I moved away, with my head turned to look at him, I tripped over a pile of garbage smothered in flies.

The little suburban road, loud with the din of the electric trams, stretched before me, as harsh and squalid as life.

## XXVI

WHEN I had crossed the Place Pey-Berland, and was engulfed in the icy darkness of the staircase, I began to stop thinking about Ximénès.

As soon as boyhood is behind us and we realize that we have reached the years of adolescence, there is so rich a ferment in our hearts that the immediate past is forgotten, and with it, all those joys and sorrows which, only yesterday, made up the substance of our lives. I have used the word forgotten, but forgetfulness is not the true reason for the change in us. Rather is it the need to lay in a store of memories for future winters. There will be days ahead when the heart will stumble on reminders of those loves and friendships which now seem dead for ever. In just such a way did the face of José Ximénès fade from my consciousness. But to-day, when I find myself less loved and certainly less young, there is a pleasure for me in recalling the image of that strange young man.

Nothing seemed to matter to me, at the moment, but one urgent preoccupation: should I see Camille before I left? Should I be able to take her once more in my arms? I went to Granny's room with the secret hope that she would not let me go away without the sacrament of a farewell kiss. My entry interrupted a discussion. In spite of the heat, Granny and Sister Marie-Henriette were making a great show of concentrating on their knitting, as though the poor were clamouring for warm waistcoats, and could not wait. My aunt, with her hands on her knees, and her eyes concealed behind dark glasses, had

the expressionless look of an owl. Maybe she was hoarding such little sight as remained to her. Two walls of darkness were thickening to right and left. With each day that passed they came closer and closer together. Soon they would meet, and then she would enter a world where it is always night.

Since my uncle was there, too, surrounded by his own particular smell of frangipane and Virginia tobacco, I guessed that some question involving money had just been broached. Though he was still slim and fair-haired, he was approaching the age when pleasures become expensive. Granny was making it quite clear that she would not let him have a certain sum which, so he said, was necessary for his health. The doctor had told him that he must go to Aix for the waters. As I opened the door I heard him say that he would give a wide berth to the gaming-tables, adding that there was no need to worry, since there was no longer any gambling to be had at Aix-les-Bains. His mottled cheeks were sagging, his blubber lips looked sullen. 'He's going to make a scene'—I thought. His cigarette was burning the carpet. Sister Marie-Henriette put out a large foot to extinguish it. Vaguely, in the dusk, I could see the Ceres on the mantelpiece, the little jewel-case set with moonstones, the portrait of Pius IX—all the objects with which I had been familiar since my childhood. Many were already wrapped in pages from *La Croix* and *l'Univers*. In this confined paradise where religious-minded and ageing women, with no poetry in their hearts had, all unwittingly, taught me the meaning of poetry; in this room of Granny's, where old things filled the air with a faint aroma of spices and lavender-water, my uncle felt stifled. I knew the nature of *his* paradise. One day, in a suburban road into which I had strayed by accident, I had seen him on the balcony of a small red-brick house, dressed in violet pyjamas. Beside him, a woman with untidy hair was

watering some geraniums. From the artificial colouring of her hair and her cheeks, I knew that she was of easy virtue.

This memory made me smile. But then the thought came to me of Camille, the sweet offspring of this squalid rake, and I fled for refuge to my room. The mosquito-net was bellying above my bed. From the window I could see a light in Camille's room on the floor below. I leaned out. That light held me suspended over empty darkness. On the doorsteps of the nearby houses caretakers and shopkeepers were sitting in their chairs as though crushed by the weight of the enveloping darkness.

A stagnant stench of horses, and the smell of absinthe rose from the pavement. I knelt down and buried my face in the bolster. But the words of the evening prayer died on my lips. The high-pitched nasal shindy of a phonograph shattered the stillness. Suddenly, I thought I heard a footstep in the corridor. My heart began to race. I dared not hope it might be Camille. I opened the door and tip-toed out, barefooted. There was no one to be seen. The trunks with their rounded lids were ranged against the wall. I groped my way downstairs to the first floor, and stopped in front of Camille's door. My two hands were pressed to my chest, and so complete was the silence that I could hear the young girl turning the pages of a book. In spite of myself, I murmured her name. The rustle of turned leaves no longer broke the quiet. I spoke it again, and this time so distinctly that I was tempted to turn tail. But at last I plucked up courage to open the door, and saw Camille standing by a low table with a lamp on it. Her thin body under the close-fitting nightdress, and her pendent hands, caught the light, but her face was in shadow. I dared not take another step, but whispered—'It is me. . . .' She took my head between her hands, and bent above my upturned face. I can remember how, in that long moment, I could see, in the blue sky framed in the window, a crescent moon and one lone star, close to—

gether as in a primitive picture. Then, Camille told me to go away, because her mother would be coming, as she always did, to give her a good-night kiss and her blessing. I could not have spoken a word without bursting into tears, and the calmness of her voice amazed me. I was to recall later that when, on the threshold of the room, my lips had sought her eyes for the last time, I had found on them no taste of tears.

## XXVII

IT was in Paris that Granny had spent her honeymoon, and Sister Marie-Henriette her noviciate. They had informed me that the capital was in no way superior to other cities, and, in particular, not to Bordeaux, except in the height of its houses and the number of carriages and pedestrians in the streets. The Seine, according to Granny, compared with the Garonne, was a wretched stream—a sewer. ‘In July’—she added—‘the fashionable world scatters over the seaside beaches. You will see neither the Avenue de l’Impératrice, nor the Lake in the Bois at their best.’

I thought over her words while the telegraph wires beside the line climbed up and up until the next post forced them to come down and down. Opposite me, an old gentleman was deeply immersed in several obscene magazines. So purple were his cheeks that I should have liked to exhort him to make a good death. My mind was full of the events of my own life, and those especially of the previous day. A journey in a railway train is an enforced retreat, and obliges us to meditate upon our destiny. But trivial details soon came to worry me. The restaurant-car jolted so badly that the Evian water went up my nose instead of down my throat. I tried to foresee the difficulties I might encounter in recovering my luggage. On the advice of Father de Roquetaillade, Granny had chosen for me an hotel in the rue des Saints-Pères, which was highly commended by an ecclesiastical, and even an episcopal, clientèle. José Ximénès, on our last day together, had warned me against this highly respectable establishment. ‘You must explain to

your grandmother that you could not get a room there, and go instead to the Carlton in the Champs-Élysées. Not that I don't know the inconvenience of these luxury places. You find them the world over, and they are always the same. Whether in Cairo or Aix-les-Bains, Constantinople or Biarritz, they leave behind them an identical memory of stucco pillars, central-heating, lifts, gypsy music, and the constant feeling, which one dare not put into words, that one is spending a great deal too much money.' All the same, he had said, it was essential, on one's first introduction to the great city, to lodge on the Champs-Élysées. Only there should I experience that delicious fever in the blood, that meretricious emotion which gives such value to the evenings spent by a young provincial under the Paris chestnuts.

I realized how right he was when, lounging in a grimy but well-sprung cab, I crossed the Place de la Concorde 'in the last glow of the setting sun, fanned by the evening breeze which gives an added life to the end of a lovely day.' I deliberately quote those words of André Chénier. The thought of him held a peculiar thrill for me in this Place where, according to a misleading story by Vigny, I imagined that the lover of the young captive had met his death. As soon as I had entered the hotel, I managed to assume that precise air of worldly indifference in addressing the receptionist which saved me from that gentleman's contempt. But it was only when I leaned out on my balcony overlooking the avenue, that I was conscious of the thrill which José Ximénès had promised that I should find intoxicating.

How soon and suddenly did the college park and the chapel withdraw from my consciousness, and all the many objects upon which the astonished eyes of childhood had gazed! With what swiftness did the heart within my breast change from what it had been when, walking home from school along a

suburban road in the melancholy of a late afternoon, I had stared with such eager eyes through the garden railings of the villas I had passed! But I avoided all thought of Camille, as, at certain hours, one drives away the memories of the beloved dead. As I looked down at the gliding, silent cars making their way westward to the Arc de Triomphe, I felt the growth within me of a foolish longing for applause, an increasing determination to win the admiration of the mob. That evening, after studying the pages of Larousse, I rejoiced to find that Lamartine, at just my age, had been no more than an unknown youth with an over-heated brain.

I carefully avoided the thought that the more sensitive minds in Paris had recognized my father's genius. But how continually it plagued me! I had no wish for a fame that was not mine by right of personal achievement. At a single stride I reached the summit of that ugly vice, ambition, and suffered because I could not say, with Vigny: 'I have made illustrious a name which came to me unhonoured and unsung. . . .' But for the fact that I had in my pocket an invitation to see an Exhibition of some of my father's pictures at the Bernheim Gallery, I might, perhaps, have forgotten that the name I bore was not wholly unknown to the dwellers in this city.

Tears welled up in my eyes because in the whole of Paris there was no one in whom I could confide. Then I remembered that I had some cousins who lived in the rue Galilée. They had come to Ousilanne during the last summer holidays, and I had been dazzled by the manners of their son, Philippe. I had the recollection of one blazing day when he had set himself to please Camille and humiliate me. But, this evening, my longing not to be alone made me indulgent. I saw, upon my plan of Paris, that the rue Galilée was not far from my hotel. I went downstairs. The sun was setting behind the Arc de Triomphe just as I had so often seen it described in books. I



walked along the avenue, freed from all memories, stripped of my past, as though I had been born again. An artless sentiment of heroism, a craving to be famous, made me throw back my head, and long to see a regiment pass with trumpets sounding and flags flying. Some work-girls, arm-in-arm, stretched like a chain across the pavement. They turned to look at me, and of this power exercised by a young man upon the feminine heart which ten years of provincial life had not revealed to me, ten minutes in the Paris streets gave me assurance.

At the house in the rue Galilée, the concierge informed me, not without a faint air of contempt, that my Ducasse cousins were at the sea. I was disappointed. But at the corner of the street I bumped into Philippe whose tiresome appearance of conventional elegance I recognized at once. He blushed at my astonishment and explained that after the fifteenth of July no one 'worth anything', who happened to be still in Paris, proclaimed that fact. I asked him to dine with me, and he gladly accepted an invitation which would allow him to absent himself from the family table where his parents never tired of talking about their son's failure to take his Degree. I felt silently grateful that he no longer wished to dazzle me. He took me to see his mother, and I expressed great admiration of the Louis XVI drawing-room, not knowing that its like was to be found a million times repeated all over Paris.

When I left the house with Philippe, a mild July night awaited us. He expressed the wish to dine in a certain grill-room where he was well known, and to which a certain 'little friend' of his was a frequent visitor.

When we reached the place several young men with girlish eyes were sucking down cocktails. Among them was a jockey with bandy legs who reminded me of the lead soldiers which, as a child, I had detached from their horses. Our table was soon covered with a plethora of hors-d'oeuvres, and the fear

that I should not be able to sample all of them spoiled my appetite.

'Ah, there's my friend!' . . . said Philippe.

She was a young woman with dark hair, a rather pasty complexion and the loveliest eyes I had ever seen. Her mouth was startlingly red and, above it, I noticed a line of down which, on my own upper lip, I should have regarded as a useful adjunct. She lost no time in telling us that she had just come from a rehearsal, though at what theatre she did not say. Knowing nothing of the Paris *demi-monde* I treated her with that rather ceremonious politeness in which my grandmother had instructed me, though nowadays it is found only in elderly gentlemen. Since Liette de Monceau's ambition was to be treated with respect, I was quite unconsciously employing the the best method of seduction open to me. The thought that I was having dinner with what Granny always darkly referred to as an 'opera-girl', though it would probably have been truer to describe her quite simply as a woman of the streets, filled me with remorse, though, at the same time it gave me a glow of pride. Champagne always made me talkative. Philippe did not want to show annoyance at the success I was having with his friend, but when I suggested that we should finish up the evening at the Ambassadeurs, he complained of a headache. We decided, therefore, to drive Liette home. She sat between us, and when I expressed the hope that she was not feeling crushed, the voice in which she answered the question had a languid sound. She lived in Montmartre, and I wished that the drive could go on for ever. A great expanse of stars glittered above my head, but the moral law had ceased to exist within my heart. This state of mind lasted only until we reached our goal, and as soon as I was alone, I felt ashamed.

I had been brought up by Granny and Sister Marie-Henriette in the company of a young girl. At school I had been one of

those pious and scrupulous little boys whom ignorance of evil keeps from harm. As I grew older I believed that there could be no higher ambition than to avoid contamination, and to move through the world like a great Archangel. I remembered how, one day at the Bordeaux Fair, I had ventured with some friends into a 'knocking-shop', how one of the women had sat on my knee, and how I hadn't known what to do with my hands. When I got home and gave Granny my good-night kiss, she had said that I stank of cheap scent. This simple comment had completely bowled me over, and I had spent the night in tears.

A few days before I came away, I heard Mlle Dumoliers, through the wall, talking to my grandmother:

'Do you think it wise, Adila, to let so young a man travel all by himself?'

'What are you trying to insinuate, my dear?' had been Granny's tart reply.

What the wretched Dumoliers was trying to insinuate was that a young man is exposed to great temptations, and that there was no reason to suppose that I should escape the common lot.

'My grandson is incapable of doing anything *low*. I have never doubted him, and I beg you, as you value my friendship, never to mention the subject again.'

Having said her say, Granny retired into an obstinate silence, which Mlle Dumoliers tried, in vain, to penetrate. She was not asked to stay to dinner. Merely because she had thrown doubts upon my virtue, she had been deprived of that small daily pleasure which the poor relation finds in being asked to take her seat at an abundant meal with two helpings of everything.

It had been borne in upon me that evening that I was only too capable of doing something 'low', and the shame which that realization caused me, kept me awake for a long time. I awoke at nine. The waiter put my early breakfast down on

the table, and, with it, one of those express letters which I have since learned are known as 'petits-bleus' and make it so easy for one to get out of engagements at the last moment, in the world of Paris. It was merely to inform me that Liette would be doing nothing that evening, and would be glad to dine with me somewhere 'nice'. It seems only too true that, as the Scriptures tell us, an enemy takes advantage of sleep to break into a house. A man may fall asleep with his hands crossed and his spirit commended to God, yet wake with a heart filled with evil desires. And so it was that I leaned over my balcony that morning in pagan mood, and, like the young Goethe, would willingly have sacrificed to the sun.

I wandered through the Louvre, but the sight of so many marvels did nothing to dissipate my sense of impatience. I had been prepared to admire everything, and was not a little ashamed to find that I felt nothing at all. José Ximénès had told me how deeply Manet's *Olympia* had moved him, and I despaired at having to admit that I found no beauty in it. Titian's *Man with a Glove*, and Bronzino's *Young Sculptor* did, certainly, give me a thrill, but my feelings were not disinterested because what I found in those pictures was a sense of restless youth which reflected my own. Before Rembrandt's *Pilgrims at Emmaus* I did, admittedly, hit on a fine phrase in which to express the splendour of the risen Christ, but only to realize that it was nothing but a faint echo of Fromentin.

From masterpiece to masterpiece I went, and reached the exit at last more as a result of chance than intention. My programme included visits to other collections. I would not let myself off adhering to it, but neither would I admit that all I could find there would be boredom. Bernheim was showing some of my father's works. Uncertain of the effect they would have upon me, I could think of nothing worse than that they should produce no effect at all.

The sellers of picture-postcards round the statue of Gambetta did not press their wares on me. This was reassuring, since it showed that at least I did not look like a young man up from the country! Never did anyone show less eagerness to reach his appointed goal. I dawdled, ill at ease, and frequently paused to look at the shop windows. Having made my way to the picture-dealer's premises at last, I had to wait until I could pluck up courage enough to go in. The light reflected from the ceiling showed the canvases to advantage, but at first I dared not look at them. But it was impossible to resist for long: they fairly 'leaped to the eye'. In an astonishing riot of vegetation, a swarm of happy and lascivious monkey-like creatures lay at ease, specimens of an ingenuous humanity before the coming of Original Sin. They belonged, surely, to an age when animals spoke and virtue and vice were one? As on that far-away evening of my childhood when, in Mlle Dumoliers' drawing-room I had pored over a reproduction cut from *l'Illustration*, I did perhaps feel, for a passing moment, that the universe revealed upon these walls, had a genuine existence, and that I had been born of the man who had created it. But very soon I relapsed once more into the mood of the prosaic boy who had felt more at home with the pictures of Alphonse de Neuville. Each example was a puzzle to me. I tried to make out the subject. 'What does it represent?'—I asked myself. From a feeling of duty towards my father, I stayed by each picture until I had succeeded in finding a definite title for it. But soon I had to give up trying. It was impossible, I felt, to distinguish a monkey from a woman. Some of the animals looked like toys cut out of tin. The landscapes seemed to me no more than meaningless messes, and as to perspective, well, there had been more of *that* in the drawings I had scribbled on the margins of my school-books. A flood of conflicting emotions poured in upon me: pride at the thought that the name I was to make

famous was no obscure one, even though it might make people laugh! The task, I thought, would at least be worthy of my genius. Then, I surrendered to a sudden access of humility, when I remembered what José had said about my father's painting—that it was something far greater than we realized. With a vague sense of pride I looked at all the people who had gone out of their way to come and admire the work of the man whose son I was. Deep within myself I heard an echo of the words he had once spoken to his faintly indulgent and mocking young wife—'You don't begin to understand . . . you don't begin to understand!' . . . All round me the visitors who stopped and looked were speaking in low voices as though they were in some house of the dead.

Two very young men with no hair on their faces, or else so closely shaved that there appeared to be none, wearing white gloves and bowler hats down to their ears, were spreading fragrant waves of chypre all round them. A faint smile flickered between their over-red lips. Seeing that people were looking at them, they became as serious as two schoolboys caught out in some misdemeanour, and began to beat a retreat after an exchange of conspiratorial winks. An artist came through the door. I recognized him as an artist because he was wrapped in a black cloak and was crowned with a wide-brimmed felt hat which cast a deep shadow on a bloodless face which was like that of a bad priest, a face worn, no doubt, to a white mask by extraordinary sins. His long hair hung down over a white silk scarf knotted with careful nonchalance. A lady and several young girls were, if I may so express it, drinking in every word that fell from his lips. The lady was one of those luxury creatures whom the great dress-making houses swathe in table-cloths. Her smile, which was as fixed and changeless as that of a death's-head, terrified me. There was something horrible in her appearance of eternal youth, reminiscent of the faces of

Egyptian courtesans who have been dug up, intact, after the passage of a thousand years. Pleasure had dug hollows in her cheeks more effectively than starvation or penury could have done. 'He combines Ingres' drawing with Delacroix's use of light'—the man in the black cloak was saying: 'and synthesizes the painting of his age.' The lady and the young girls were obviously intoxicated by the certainty with which he spoke. They had invested him with infallibility, and were accepting his maxims as though they had been holy writ. Another of his brilliant sayings was:—'In him we have the whole of painting, just as the Bible, Aeschylus and Claudel make all other literature unnecessary.' I tried to remember what I had read of Aeschylus. As to Claudel, I was hearing his name for the first time—or could he be referring to a chap I knew called Cladel?

I began to feel a headache coming on. Sitting in a dazed sort of way on a bench, I listened to the muted roar of the boulevards. I remembered that first morning of the holidays when an emotional and rather too eloquent letter of my father's, a letter from beyond the grave, had failed to distract my mind from the warm smell of the garden which reached me even where I lay in bed, revelling in a glorious sense of laziness. It was not now Ousilanne, nor the clear light of a summer's morning which drove that sacred memory from my mind, but the voluptuous influence of the Paris dusk. I left the gallery without so much as taking a last look at the walls, smiling at the picture of Liette which floated before my eyes.

By five o'clock I was back at the hotel. Like Esther who steeped herself for long months in perfumes, I wished to give infinite care to my preparations for the evening. There was nothing wrong with my dinner-jacket which had been cut for me in Bordeaux by an English tailor. The task of dressing occupied me till the light began to go. Before I left home, my

uncle had given me a box of those *Abdulla* cigarettes which have rose-petal tips, as soft to the lips as other lips would be. As I lit one of them, Liette appeared in the doorway of the smoking-room. She was wearing a wide-brimmed summer hat which left her eyes in shadow, and a simple, light-coloured dress which did not cover her shoulders. Our carriage clove the dusk. The languishing young woman listened with a smile to the words in which I tried to express her beauty. What I was experiencing could not be perfect happiness, though for another it would have been the perfection of pleasure. When we arrived at the Pavillon d'Armenonville, women round flower-decked tables were shedding evening wraps, their senses already aroused by the tune the gypsy band was playing, which was the one of all others they 'had a thing' about. What brought a flush to my cheeks was not pride but shame. Instead of plucking, like a child, the sensual pleasure of the summer evening, I lowered my eyes, and felt that by this tiny gesture, I was revealing the consciousness within myself of something that was infinitely valuable. The gypsy music was making Liette half swoon with ecstasy, had its effect upon me, too. But that effect was not so much pleasurable as disturbing. It awoke in me no facile tingling of the senses, but struck as deep as might have done the *Fifth Symphony* or *Isolde's Liebestod*. In this odiously delicious setting, I found myself suddenly facing the mysterious presence of *vocation*—though not in the narrow sense of religious vocation which is what we usually attribute to that word. What I felt was that some terrible Providence was turning, in advance, all other joys to dust and ashes in my mouth. The smile on the lips of the young and willing woman at my side, held an unspoken promise. But all I wanted was to run from her. In spite of the fact that the night was very hot, Liette wanted me to drive her home in a closed carriage. The headlights of passing motor-cars briefly lit up the grassy verges



of the road. I sought refuge in that excessive politeness which, at first, had so delighted her, but now I felt that it was making her furious. I was obsessed by the memory of the cab in which Emma Bovary had given herself to her lover. I needed no such lesson as I hung above those parted lips. But I know not what invisible presence kept me from indulging in a more passionate embrace. Camille, in her school uniform was looking out at me from my past, and my mother, whom I scarcely remembered, was leaning over me as once she had done over her sleeping child. Remorse and desire burned me with an equal flame. When we reached Liette's lodging, I kissed her hand, gave the address of my hotel to the driver, and went off, leaving her motionless upon the pavement, and so bewildered that I can almost fancy her still standing there! Alone at last, I shed tears of nervous exhaustion, disappointment and disgust. True, I had escaped, and yet I longed to be like those other young men who could, without a second thought, enjoy the gift of every passing pleasure.

Next morning, a note from Liette made it abundantly clear that, in spite of my extraordinary behaviour, she still wanted to see me again. She would not be going out at all that day, she said, and would be at home only to me. I have already mentioned that, on waking, no metaphysical problems ever worried me. I looked at myself in the wardrobe mirror, and saw under my tousled hair a rather pale face, two eyes ringed with dark shadows, and a somewhat sickly appearance. I stuck out my tongue at this idiotic reflection, sat down at the table, and, on a sheet of the handsome hotel note-paper, composed a letter which the young chevalier de Faublas might have been proud to sign. At this moment, a telegram was brought to me. I had to read it several times before the words made sense. In it my aunt informed me that grandmamma was *in extremis*, and asked me to return to Bordeaux at the earliest possible moment.

## XXVIII

**A** DARK blue curtain dimmed the light in the compartment. The inevitable fat man, breathing stertorously, who has always made me hate night journeys, sat dozing opposite with his paunch exposed to my disgusted gaze. He had insisted on having the windows shut, and the stale smell of his extinguished cigar poisoned the whole carriage.

And so the child came back before God had left him time in which to turn prodigal. By her death, Granny had yet again saved me from evil. A relentless protection hovered over my destiny. I had not, like other men, that freedom of action which would have let me be a sinner. Against sin, God had armed me with the gift of timidity, disgust and scruples which had as much to do with family as with religion. At the very moment of my threatened fall, all the dogmas of my faith, all God's commandments had been promulgated in my heart by the voice of conscience. A family-council, of the dead as well as the living persons of my race, had automatically come together to sit in judgment on me. In the last resort, at the first hint of real danger, one of my relations, and the most loved of all, had decided to die, had set her grave, unbridgeable, between the actuality of pleasure and my desire.

I had not been allowed even the consolation of rebellion. I knew that the law which lay so heavily upon me was both gentle and reasonable. If it was austere, it was not inhuman. Far from forbidding me to taste of pleasure, it was merely disciplining my passions, and setting limits which I must not overstep. That law did nothing to cut me off from a woman's love. On the contrary, it made that love eternal and imposed

fruitfulness on union. Far from condemning human love, it raised that love to the dignity of a sacrament. The rhythm of the wheels set echoing in my head those lines of the *Bonne Chanson* in which poor Verlaine had hymned the joys of married love.

*Le foyer, la lueur étroite de la lampe;  
La Rêverie avec le doigt contre la tempe  
Et les yeux se perdant parmi les yeux aimés;  
L'heure du thé fumant et des livres fermés;  
La douceur se sentir la fin de la soirée;  
La fatigue charmante et l'attente adorée  
De l'ombre nuptiale et de la douce nuit.*

As the dawn gradually whitened the grimy windows, I conjured up the picture of Granny dead. Now she had gone, I realized for the first time that the only human being whose love for me was infinite, would never speak again, would never again let me see her smile: that the old gnarled hands with their prominent veins would never more stroke my hair, and that when next I went into her room no look of love would greet me. Then it was that misery descended on the heart of that small boy I once had been, who, overcome by a sense of loneliness in a crowded school-room, had cried behind the lifted lid of his desk. . . .

The fat man stirred on the brink of wakefulness. I wiped my eyes, and, as we rushed through the noisy stations in the pale light of dawn, I recited my morning prayer, and then the formula, 'May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. . . .'

Then, once again, I sought consolation in the picture of a calm and selfish happiness. I thought of Camille, and now my love was no longer that of a child.

I saw her as she had been long ago, a small girl with a violent temper who thought it fun to make me cry: and then, the

passionate adolescent with a liking for kisses and secret letters. Had I been wrong to doubt her love? Though she had given me some proof of it, there had been moments when she seemed withdrawn. When she said good-bye to me, she had done so without a tear.

I remembered that José had often spoken to me of the mysterious quality in young girls. Ever since his fifteenth year, at Saint-Sébastien, where he spent his holidays, his brooding eyes had troubled many hearts, and on hot nights upon the beach he had known the savour of inexperienced lips. When I boasted of Camille's complexities, of her enigmatic glances, and the nature of her silences, he said: 'We should not take too much pleasure in the mystery of young girls. We think that women are mysterious because of our inability to read their hearts with accuracy, to adapt ourselves to the confused movements of their instincts. . . .'

The fat man was busily eating brioches, and at every mouthful he swallowed, he made a most ridiculous noise. We ran through Libourne, and from now on the names of the stations brought back into my mind the memory of Sunday walks, and travelling home in a bus filled with sweating holiday-makers. I should have liked to concentrate my thoughts on grandmamma, and was shocked to find that I could feel nothing but an anticipatory disgust at the prospect of all the embraces to which I should have to submit, of the funeral service, and the complications about money which were bound to ensue. As we plunged into the Lormont tunnels, I was once again obsessed by a visual image of Camille. I passionately longed for her to be like the ideal of young womanhood as we find it presented in the music of Schumann and the poems of Francis Jammes—the Christian maiden saying her simple prayer before partaking in the calm and sanctified pleasures of the marriage-bed. There were certain aspects of her life

which I would gladly have forgotten: the satisfaction she had found in making me cry when I was an over-sensitive small boy; her kisses in the dusk of the summer holidays which had so nearly overcome my scruples; her flirtation with our Paris cousin, Philippe Ducasse, when he had come to see us at Ousilanne.

So wholly did she occupy my mind that I could no longer see her clearly.

When she greeted me with an indifferent and preoccupied air, I looked at her with passionate curiosity. She took me to the dead woman's room, telling me, on the way, about the details of the last sad crisis. One morning, Sister Marie-Henriette had found grandmamma, already cold, and with her mouth fallen open. But when she reached this point she had to leave me, having 'a number of orders to give'. She added, with a self-important look, that she had 'the keys to all the cupboards.' Granny had had a passion for those old peasant linen-presses known as '*lingères*'. They cumbered the hall and the landings. In style they were a country variant of Louis XV, and the tawny colour of their polished panels seemed still to hold something of the light reflected from the dazzling suns and roaring winter fires of childhood. I had often pressed my face to them, because they smelled of beeswax and varnish. They were filled with the coarse linen which used to be woven in the heathland farmstead which we had inherited from our Dartiailh uncle. Granny had always jealously kept the keys in her own hands. I can see her still, seated in front of one of the presses, with its doors wide open, issuing instructions to Sister Marie-Henriette, who, short and podgy, was perched upon a stool (how I used to hope she would fall off!) in an attempt to reach the topmost shelf.

Camille said again, in a tone of voice which I tried hard not to find triumphant: 'I've got all the keys, now.' . . .

## XXIX

**B**ECAUSE of the flies, the dead woman's face had been covered with a gauze veil. It was already too late for me to kiss her forehead. In spite of the strong smell of aromatics, I half held my breath. Various cousins came quietly into the room, weeping and whispering—those indeterminate cousins who always seem to spring from nowhere at weddings and funerals. The street was full of summer noises. Watering-carts were busy laying the dust.

I could not keep my eyes from the body. A rosary was loosely festooned round the linked fingers, and the crucifix upon her breast had a terrible look of immobility. The face which for so long had been familiar to me, had ceased to exist. It looked like an old daguerreotype of her as a young woman.

There were not many people at the funeral. It was a summer funeral. Letters of condolence reached us from various Swiss hotels. Their wording with difficulty avoided conveying a sense of happiness and well-being. I sat, thinking of nothing, endlessly writing down addresses.

We spent the following days at Ousilanne. The chapel was shut up. God no longer dwelt in it, for the privilege of having Him in our garden had passed from us with the passing of grandmamma. A notice on the front entrance announced that the estate was for sale, and the weeds on the paths were eloquent of abandonment. Castagnède, the notary, came every day to see us. The drawing-room under its dust-sheets had a look of mourning. The family-council was in permanent session round the Louis-Philippe table.

In reply to the questions put to him by M. Castagnède, my

uncle embarked upon a series of confused explanations, from which it emerged that he had mortgaged his share in the property, and that Ousilanne would have to be sold before I could hope to get any part of the money due to me. I suggested that I should keep the house and grounds, but in vain. M. Castagnède, with that lofty contempt felt by all lawyers for the high-falutin attitude of sentimental heirs, pointed out that for the time being, at least, I should not be able to lay my hands on sufficient capital to make the estate a running concern. He spoke with authority, quoted figures, and advised my uncle to terminate my minority. Each time he stopped for breath, we could hear, though we could not see, a great blue-bottle bumping against the ceiling. The house seemed to be lying dormant under a weight of heat and silence. My uncle, with his elbows on his knees, was twiddling his monocle. He had forgotten to dye his hair, and it showed white at the roots. I should have thought of him as an old man but for the fact that when, about four o'clock, a young country-girl brought in some beer, I saw him throw out his chest, twirl his moustache, and flash the pointed teeth under his short upper lip.

My aunt sat silently knitting. Black glasses concealed her almost sightless eyes. Camille was attentive to the needs of all those present. What God had transformed the sturdy, rebellious young girl I once had known into this thin-faced stranger? Her dark eyes which had so often flashed with mirth or anger, looked now like stagnant pools, and I was surprised to see that they were ringed with shadow. The child of bygone summers, with her little gusts of gentleness, who, in the twilight had shaken me to the core with fluttering kisses, was wholly unrecognizable in this tall, aloof young woman. While Castagnède was getting me to append my initials to various incomprehensible legal forms, I looked at her hands lying in the lap of her black dress. Even more than schoolgirl chattering,

I had loved in her those ardent silences, as of a diminutive martyr, and there had been times when I wanted to cry because she looked so like a Spartan boy hiding some terrible pain of which I knew nothing.

I found her very much more interesting than the notary. I felt quite sure that he was forcing our hands in this matter of selling Ousilanne, because my father had certainly left me enough to enable me to buy it back at some future date. But so passionately attached was M. Castagnède to the 'Côte d'Argent' that he had acquired land at Saint-Eulalie-en-Born, the value of which was not increasing. In his wily lawyer's mind, he had already decided to sell me part of it. Being quite incapable of discussing matters of that sort, I let him have his way, all the more readily because Ousilanne was, in my eyes, the place in which my childhood had been spent, the setting of a play the last act of which was over now. I felt, therefore, that the time had come to throw it on the dust-heap.

When women have to deal with sensitive young men of good education, the trick that serves them best is, as a rule, silence, because even the most stupid of them can always manage to produce a soulful look in their eyes. All the same, it worried me to find Camille taking so much interest in the running of a household of which her mother's poor health, and our grandmother's death, had made her mistress. After an unusually good dinner, she was as pleased as Punch if my uncle congratulated her. The counting and sorting of the linen was now her concern, and she found the quarrels of the domestic staff ceaselessly thrilling. She would talk about them in the evening, while I turned over the pages of those old *Magasins pittoresques* with which I had been long familiar, renewing acquaintance with the mild and charming pictures which had filled the sleepy twilights of my boyhood with enchantment, and provided the raw materials of my happiest dreams. 'Keeping



house is a new sort of game to her'—I told myself. But our playing at love had also been a game, had it not?—and clearly she now thought nothing of it compared with the new pleasure of playing the part of a small domestic tyrant.

Sometimes, in the hope of improving on the very banal tone of our conversation, I read aloud. Camille kept her head bent over her embroidery, and the lamp shone only on her untidy hair. She thought nothing of interrupting me in the middle of a poem with:—'Oh dear! I've broken my thread'—or—'do, please, lend me your scissors!', and I could tell from the way she said it that she was trying to control a nervous irritability.

I should have liked to tell her, or anyhow to let her guess, how Paris had revealed to me the true state of my heart, and that I knew now that what I wanted above all else was to live my life in a close union with her.

Since Granny's death the habit of family prayers had been discontinued. We said good-night to one another, about nine o'clock, at our bedroom doors. But once, when the moon was full, I lingered on for a while in the garden. The weeds on the paths disappeared, as though by magic, in the half-light, and house and grounds were once again as I had known them in the clear stillness of other nights in other summers. I seemed to see again the flicker of the sanctuary lamp behind the stained-glass window of the chapel, and I lived over once more those silent walks of long ago. I felt as though I were about to round some long familiar corner and see upon the terrace the motionless figures of Granny and Sister Marie-Henriette. As then, so now, the breeze wafted a scent of unseen flowers, but there was no one to say: 'how sweet the petunias smell to-night'. . . .

I heard the sound of footsteps on the path. Camille was coming towards the bench on which I was sitting. Seeing me there, she first seemed about to move away, but then, not daring to avoid me quite so openly, sat down beside me.

'What a lovely night!'—I murmured.

These simple words had the effect of irritating her. Perhaps she was afraid I might embark upon a flood of noble sentiments. She broke into a gabble of words, and talked of the most trivial matters: how, for instance, she had had to give a dose of laudanum to my uncle who had complained of colic. But he had fallen asleep at last, and she had come out for a breath of fresh air.

'It reminds me,' I said 'of the nights we had last summer, Camille. . . .'

I saw her wrinkle her forehead, as she always did now at the slightest threat of anything faintly emotional, and I felt wounded to the heart. But perhaps she was deliberately playing a part? It occurred to me, for a moment, that she might be seeing herself as Camille in *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*. She remarked, with an air of forced gaiety, that moonlit nights returned at fixed intervals, and that, anyhow, the summer was a tiresome season. I was amazed at the stupid things she said, such as:—'One can always get warm in the winter, but it's not so easy to keep cool in the summer.' The mosquitoes, she said, kept her awake. Sitting there with her elbows on her knees, she stared at the ground. She did not sit, as she had used to do, with her neck resting against the back of the bench, nor did she look up at the shooting-stars which carry up to God the wishes of young girls.

'Camille'—I murmured, 'oh Camille! why are you keeping your heart an exile from your life? There was a time when you and I felt our love one with nature's scents and sounds, with the whispering of the leaves and the measured movement of the stars. . . .'

'Oo! poetry!'—she exclaimed, and so naturally common was the intonation of her voice, that I could no longer dare to hope that it might have been deliberately assumed.

I hid my face in my hands. The bitter taste of tears repressed

which I had once known on my fingers, I tasted now! But I had reckoned without the moon, and Camille guessed that I was crying.

'Let us forget,' she said, 'that we ever played the game of marriage. You are still a child, Jacques, and I, a grown-up girl, almost a woman. Why, I am responsible for everything here!'

I protested angrily:

'Children don't dine with actresses at the Pavillon d'Armenonville, nor seduce them in a matter of hours!'

I told her all about my Paris adventures, in the hope that she might be dazzled. At first, indeed, she turned on me a more serious look. But I felt annoyed and shocked by her smile when I described Liette left standing on the pavement, without so much as a torn scrap of my dinner-jacket in her disappointed hands.

I did not, at that time, know that young girls find it difficult to distinguish the sublime from the ridiculous, nor that, no matter how pure they themselves may be, they give men little credit for their virtue. I told her with detailed care how I dreamed of a love which should be both passionate and hallowed. I described to her the future as I would have it be—the quiet evening hours, the reading aloud, the work cut short by a kiss, and the love-filled silence of the nuptial chamber. . . . 'There are other things in life besides love'—she said, so sharply that I was left in no uncertainty about her refusal to be enchanted by my studied periods. 'Mamma'—she went on—'is slowly going blind. About my father, I dare not speak to you. My dear, I have serious things to attend to now. . . .'

There was the same hard, dictatorial note in her voice which I had noticed in my aunt's when she was issuing instructions to the servants. I felt vaguely uneasy, but longed to retain my faith in the idol which I had constructed in her image. Should I not rather have felt admiration at her acceptance of the 'boring, superficial claims of life' with so high a courage?

I put a question to her in a low voice:

'But surely you will marry some day, won't you, Camille?'

The chestnuts rustled over our heads in the darkness. She answered primly:

'The man I marry must be mature and practical-minded. . . .'

I went on tracing lines upon the gravel with my stick, because it takes time for certain words to reach the heart. My silence seemed to surprise her. Probably she was thinking that I was indifferent to what she had said. She was insensitive enough to indulge in a stupid piece of mockery:

'Do you think that what happened in Paris can inspire confidence . . . even in a virtuous woman?'

I looked at the girl who had become a stranger to me, and go to my feet with a little shudder of disgust:

'Camille'—I said: 'you are not what I hoped you would be. . . .'

'Does it occur to you that there's not a woman in the world who wouldn't be exasperated beyond bearing by your noble sentiments? . . .'

I heard again the shrill note in her voice, and recognized the shoddy wish to wound which makes an angry woman seek out the most sensitive spot, so that she may strike at it.'

'A seminary is the proper place for you, dear cousin. . . .'

I listened in silence, but seemed to see, in a patch of moonlight, the little boy I once had been, walking away with a satchel full of dreams. Dear God, was I then incapable of loving? Was it my fate never to be loved?

I launched one last passionate protest:

'The woman whom I seek exists, and somewhere she is waiting for me. Those who know nothing of evil, understand, better than do other men, the mystery in women. In them, the act of possession goes far beyond mere sensual pleasure. For them, for those who, like me, had an unsullied childhood,

woman is flesh of our flesh, heart of our heart, part of our gentleness and silence, of our infinite weakness. . . .’

Camille was not listening, but staring at my flushed face, and I had a feeling, at that moment, that she was beginning to find me attractive. Quickly I left her, but she ran after me and took the arm I did not offer her. In an awkward effort to make up for the ground she had lost, she made still further excuses, and spoke to me of the sense of duty that was keeping her at home.

‘To that duty you sacrifice no love, Camille. You do not love, you never have loved, anyone. . . .’

She said nothing, but I could feel her weight increase upon my arm. On the threshold of the sleeping house, one last question which I had made up my mind not to ask, forced its way through my lips:

‘Why did you say so often that you loved me?’

‘I thought I did, Jacques, and often, even now, I think so still. And yet, at other times I seem to feel that I no longer love you. I think I do not know my own heart. . . .’

The child I once had been had vanished at a turn in the path, in a patch of moonlight. I had at last become a man. I had met with the companion whose heart was not yet sure, who was scarcely even worried by the knowledge that she could love and then love no longer—who must endlessly be conquered, over and over again, until the moment of the last betrayal. An immense longing for sleep overcame me. I cared nothing now for the sweetness of the night. As a soldier can die without even knowing that he has been struck, so all I wanted now was to sleep and never wake.

The young girl’s fingers tightened on my hand. They almost clawed the narrow wrists under the stuff of my sleeves. The feel of her breath was on my face, and I could see her eyelids fluttering. Her dry lips touched my own. Then, freeing myself gently from her grasp, I set an indifferent kiss upon her brow.

## XXX

THE holidays ran their course in the now empty house. At first I forced myself not to think, to remain unconscious of disaster. I chose only the most stupid books from the library, and, with an armful of detective stories, sought the remotest corners of the park. The garden was for sale, and, using that as a pretext, strangers made themselves free of it and plundered the flowering shrubs. My uncle thoroughly enjoyed playing the part of guide.

Camille avoided me, and for that I was grateful. It seemed to me that this drowsy sort of existence might go on for ever. But one September evening Camille went to the piano, which she had not played since Granny's death. The *Appassionata* revealed to me the extent of my hurt. I had to escape into the garden, and there, with my forehead pressed to the trunk of a chestnut tree, I cried and cried like a child on whom a punishment has been inflicted. A passionate longing to confide in somebody, turned my thoughts to José Ximénès. I spent that night in writing a feverish letter to him, but it was two weeks before I got an answer. He apologized for this delay. My letter, he said, had followed him from city to city through the length and breadth of Italy, where he was travelling.

I feel you have done well, after your recent blow, to live from day to day, and not to think. But to succeed in such a discipline you ought to leave the scenes of your boyhood, and the people who remind you of your wound. Why not join me in this lovely climate? Here the sharp impact of new sensations would turn your mind from suffering. You

will be surprised to find how easily Italy makes it possible to live in the moment. . . .

On a series of postcards which reached me with reassuring regularity, he gave me a demonstration of his method. He had developed in himself a spirit so utterly detached from everything, that curiosity was the one lively feeling that remained. I have recently found again some of these cards, over which I pored with loving attention. One is from Bergamo, and has on it the picture of the tomb of some long-dead princess. On the other side there are a few lines in José's hand:

A warm rain has been falling, and I spent the afternoon in a small museum which is all silence, for no one comes there. No starred masterpiece compelled me to sit in judgment on my emotions. But I shall always remember a face of mortal sadness signed by a painter of whom I have never heard: Talpino.

The following, from Venice, brought him vividly before me.

To-day, the island of S. Francesco-del-Deserto, far out in the lagoon, has been raising in prayer the cypresses which look like columns of dark and motionless smoke, and singing with the repetitious voices of cracked bells which resemble those of young boys when they break at the age of fourteen. —Dusk found me in St Mark's. The golden walls seem always to be expanding, and the porphyry paving-stones to heave and undulate. The mosaics remind me of a child's attempts to draw. I get the feeling that this sublime and puerile construction may at any moment crumble and collapse. This barbarous jewel is powerless to awake my love. My heart responds more readily to the soft mockery on the face of an urchin seen in the Piazzetta. . . .

On the Lido this evening, the Adriatic was fussing round too many bathing-huts. A pale sky hung over the slate-coloured sea, and, from the deserted beach I could hear the

dying strains—as in some poem by Laforgue—of a stranded gypsy orchestra. And now I must start worrying about looking up the trains to Paris. Every return brings an increase of suffering. We find that the same pain is with us as when we started out, but with less of youth to carry its load. . . .

Then he left Venice 'like a child worn-out with having looked at too many pictures'—as he wrote. He broke the journey at Urbino, where one can see day die over that same Umbria where Saint-Francis waited for its coming among the ash-grey of the olive-groves. On a page dated from Assisi, there is but one word: *pace*.

How can I bring myself, after so many years, to read these lines? José Ximénès is dead, and who remembers him? The roofs are endlessly bowed down under a weight of fog and smoke. It is four o'clock, and already the lamps are being lit. I look at my pictures and my books with a strange feeling of distress. I light a cigarette, and that is a sufficient occupation. My gaze rests on each object, as though taking renewed possession of it after an absence. . . . My heart brings to me the memory of a room where a disturbing smell of wax and violets fills the air—a smell so over-sweet that one fears it, dreading lest it may conceal another. Two nuns are in the room. Their lips move. My friend is lying motionless for ever.

After two years of silence, José had written telling me that he was completing a retreat in the Trappist House of Sept-Fons. He gave me the date of his return. I went to meet him at the station. He was shaken with a dry cough.

'Are you ill?' I asked him.

He smiled: there was a lost look in his eyes. I remember that he answered me with these lines of Laforgue:

*Oh! couvre-toi, je t'en conjure,  
Oh! je ne veux plus entendre cette toux!*



I had a feeling of utter certainty that he was beyond all help. Each time I visited him he seemed to be further and further away.

'Only one thing matters'—he said to me: 'and that is to make a good death. . . .'

'You regret nothing?'

'Nothing.'

'José!'—I cried, 'are you going to leave me without a tear?'

He looked at me, and said very quietly:

'I know you not.'

His hand upon my head stopped moving.

'Why are you crying? I have never had of you, nor you of me, anything but the most unreal appearance. Wait until we meet again in the light of the Father. . . .'

He closed his eyes. On the grey paper of the walls there was no ornament but the face of Christ. Some Persian stuff, woven of black and gold, hid the shelves where his books were ranged. A spasm twisted his face.

'Are you in pain?'—I asked: 'would you like something to drink?'

He made a gesture of refusal. Then, in a voice that seemed to come from miles away, he said:

'Go to the piano and play. Play something that you know by heart, so that you need not light the candles.'

He spared himself no moment of the final agony. He remained sitting up in bed, panting, his face damp with sweat. The last things he looked on in this world were a humble priest from Saint-Sulpice and a brass cross. His head made a hollow in the pillow like the head of a man already dead. He was fighting for breath. I opened the window. The sky was growing pale.

'I have seen another dawn,' were his last words.

No woman's face bent over this dying child.

## XXXI

ONLY by turning my back for ever upon Ousilanne could I hope, my friend had said, to forget myself in a world of ephemeral impressions. 'My heart,' I had replied, 'will not allow me that freedom of action which would make it possible for me to find satisfaction only in forms and colours, or distraction in natural beauty. What I have already suffered cannot preserve me from further sufferings. As the young Roman, when he reached the age of manhood, put away from him the *toga praetexta*, the white robe with the purple border which was the insignia of adolescence,—so, now, my friend do I bid farewell to my sixteenth year, and feel its unslaked fevers grow calmer in my blood. . . .'

Autumn came early that year, and lay with a load of drowsiness upon the now abandoned house and garden. We had to put on clogs when we went out in the morning to gather the figs and the last of the white grapes. The paths were filled with rotting leaves. One evening, at the end of October, my uncle turned up with M. Castagnède. Ousilanne had been sold. I hurriedly completed my preparations for my Bavarian visit. On the evening before I was due to start, after dinner, rain was falling on the dead leaves, and, so dark was the night that I could not have found my way along the paths. I had to take refuge in the drawing-room where M. Castagnède and my uncle were seated by the fire celebrating the successful conclusion of the deal. I breathed in the room's peculiar smell of drooping garden-roses which brought to mind so vividly the summer days of years now gone.

'Ousilanne'—the lawyer told me—'never covered its expenses. I can get you four per cent on the forty-thousand francs which the sale will bring. . . .'

I sat there brooding. Never again should we dine upon the terrace in the dusk, when the unlifted hay filled the darkness with sweet fragrance. I saw before me a perspective of long nights in foreign cities where the only resource that I should have would be to drown my sorrow in the cool draughts of my beloved poets, and to say my evening prayers more slowly.

I could not sleep. A damp, grey dawn showed through the black tracery of leafless branches. We had to light the lamps of grandmamma's old brougham before I set off to drive to the station through a welter of melancholy suburbs. My thoughts went out to that ideal Camille whom in my heart and mind I had created for my pleasure. Through the streaming carriage windows I saw the crowds of workers labouring through the frozen mud. But already my memories of Camille were beginning to have a less bitter taste. That still September night, dappled with moonshine, when she had given the death-blow to my love, I should, perhaps, forget. Other nights of my young years might overlay it—games of hide-and-seek drawing to an end with Camille standing breathless on the garden path, with her wide-brimmed sun-hat lying at her feet like a dead bird. . . .

But here an uncomfortable thought broke in upon my dreaming. I had never learned to read what lay in her beyond the surface of appearances. Another might have known how to uncover deep infinities of silence, sweetness and weakness. Scarcely aware of what I was doing, I began to invent a legend for the little girl now dead. When I was no longer close to her, I should be able to create an image, cut to the measure of my heart, of one who should not be unworthy of my tears.

'The heart I brought to you'—I said aloud: 'was the heart

of a boy inflamed with romantic notions of friendship and filled with the intoxicating music of the church. Like a young and unarmed warrior I walked beside you, your champion and your knight. The words you spoke I found far less disturbing than your martyred silences. When I woke each morning, when the sunlight streaming through the shutters made me close my eyes, the double happiness of our two lives conjoined, caught at my breath and choked me with sheer joy.

But I am afraid for you. I am afraid of that night when, with no loved one beside you, you sink into the darkness, with none to lean above your weakness and lift you in his arms. O! dear lost child, then I shall once more take the road, and, day by day, draw closer until that moment when our hands, no longer touching in this life, shall be at rest, crossed in the same gesture on our two hearts stilled in death. . . .’

A porter opened the carriage door, and I began to worry about my luggage.

THE END

